Necessity of Connections

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Necessity of Connections

by Marwana

Summary

Part one of three: Hannibal
When Will is released from the BSHCI, he breaks all contact with Hannibal. He still lives in Wolf Trap, and he still works (part time) for the FBI Academy, he just does not respond to any of Hannibal's messages. At all. Hannibal does not accept that.
AU from Yakimono onwards.

Hannibal's part of the story is finished and will be updated every weekend.

Outtakes
"As far as Hannibal was aware, Will just fell off the earth after he had been released from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminal Insane. He had not shown up at either his house or his practice, he had not called or messaged him and he had not run into him at either crime scenes or at Quantico."

"He just knew he missed his dear, darling Will terribly and that he would love nothing more that to make that dream reality."

Notes

This story was meant to be a short one-shot, but it has become slightly more than that. It will be split up in three parts
Part 1: Hannibal,
Part 2: Will
Part 3: (spoiler)

Please be aware that Hannibal's part contains little direct interaction with Will. Their direct interaction will be from Will's part onwards.

Part 1 consists of 7 chapters:
1 Hannibal
2 The Becoming of Alana Bloom
3 The Dinner
4 The Dream
5 The Lackadaisical End
6 The Conference
7 The Conclusion of an Affair

Hannibal

As far as Hannibal was aware, Will just fell off the earth after he had been released from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminal Insane. He had not shown up at either his house or his practice, he had not called or messaged him and he had not run into him at either crime scenes or at Quantico.

Though he would never willingly divulge it, not even to Bedelia had she still be around, he was missing him desperately. Will had been the only one to truly see him even through a rebellious brain actively working against him and he had the potential to be the only one to truly appreciate him fully. He had genuinely managed to connect with the other man, and though he did not actually felt guilty for his own actions and his own role in his incarceration, he did feel remorseful for what it had done to Will and their relationship.

Even though Will had told him that the light of friendship would not reach them for a thousand years, he had hoped to mend their *attachment* to one another as soon as Will was free. He had even hoped that he would be able to turn it into something even more intimate.

However, it had been weeks, nearly months since he had last spoken to him. He had tried to reach out to him in multiple ways both fully legal and *not*, but Will had not responded.

oOo

click

"Hello Will, Hannibal here.
I seem to have reached your voicemail. Can I expect you this Thursday at seven? If Thursday is not convenient, we can meet at Quantico. Just give me a call so we can set a time and date for an appointment.

I hope to hear from you soon.

beep, beep, beep

oOo

He was aware that Will was still living in his farmhouse in Wolf Trap, Virginia, with his dogs and that he was still working for the FBI, but he had gained all that from secondary sources.

He had not been inclined to visit him in his house unless he knew where he stood in those first weeks. It would not do to appear too eager to restart their interactions again, after all. By the time it would have been appropriate, Alana combined with Will's lawsuit had made it clear that it would reflect badly onto him.

While he would not have cared to appear forceful or manipulative as Will already knew him to be both, he still had a role as a polite, reserved, calm and thoughtful psychiatrist to play for the larger world. He needed to play that particular role a while longer both to shake off the

suspicion Will managed to turn firmly on him, and to start the necessary preparations for a life with Will as his partner in every way he felt comfortable with.

He would gladly get rid of all of his masks and to only deal in honesty as soon as Will was by his side, and openly acknowledging and revelling in his own dark tendencies.

oOo

click

"Hello Will, Hannibal here.
You did not call me back and you missed you Thursday appointment, but I imagine you were overwhelmed with the amount of voicemail you have managed to collect so I assume you missed mine.

I was informed by Alana that your dogs are with you once more. How are you, and they, settling in? Do you need any help with getting your house up and running after your absence?

Will you be able to meet this Thursday's appointment? If not, shall I visit you at your place or at Quantico? You are also welcome to visit me at home. My kitchen is, after all, always open for friends and though we have our differences and difficulties currently, I still consider you to be mine.

I imagine you might not have been eating well. Shall I prepare something healthy and filling for you to bring with me? You must have lost weight while in the tender care of the state.

Please contact me, Will.

beep, beep, beep

oOo

Even though Will was no longer actively announcing the fact that he was both the Chesapeake Ripper and the Copycat, Jack was still suspicious of him. It meant that Alana was kept around longer than any other affair he had ever had and that he had weekly dinners with Jack to occupy him. Most of the times, Alana joined them for these dinners.

While he did not necessarily mind Alana and she was beautiful to look at, her particular brand of darkness, and her affinity with violence and manipulation had reached its full potential during the time he had mentored her. Her metamorphosis had been a near bloodless, quick and despondently dull affair. At the pinnacle of her becoming, she had barely even maimed the normally pliant and nonviolent patient that he had manipulated into attacking her and he himself had been forced to come to her rescue like some knight in shiny armour.

Years after the event, the woman she had grown into was without doubt intelligent and pleasant enough to converse with, but she was also easily predictable, boringly ethical and by the book, and she could not keep up with him, his metaphors and his humour.

She just could not compare to Will in any way. Will was brilliant, Will could match him and even surpass him in certain topics, Will could surprise and even manipulate him, Will was unpredictable and Will could become his true equal, the other side to his coin.

Will might not be considered beautiful or handsome the way he currently dressed and groomed himself and he might never be classed as elegant. But all he needed was decent, tailored clothing that matched his colouring, and a nice haircut and he would easily be considered up to par with Alana while on his arm. Even while grumpy and antisocial, Will was still a vision to behold.

Even had Will never entered the picture, he would have never let any affair he would have started with Alana last long. And he *would* have started one with her eventually, as he had been grooming her to act as the perfect alibi since he had met her. Him saving her from the situation he had willingly and knowingly put her into, though she would never be aware of that, had only strengthened the affection and desire she had already had for him. It had only been his reserved attitude and the scandal it might have caused for both of them that had stopped her from acting upon her *fondness* of him during her mentorship. Afterwards, it was his firm insistence that they were friends and her fear of rejection that made her hesitate, though she had subtly made her wish to become something more occasionally known.
It would have been, and it had been, easy to seduce her into his bed the moment he needed her to act as his alibi.

But with Will out of the picture as he was now, the continuous need for her to unknowingly act as his alibi, and the sheer time that had passed, her perception of their relationship had turned from ‘merely an affair’ to ‘domestic partners’. It had not been something he had wanted to encourage as she was not the one he wanted in that role, but needs must and he could only stay gentle with her for so long. She had gently breached the idea of them moving in together on two separate occasions, but he had easily held her off.

She strutted around as a peacock, proud of the fact that she had managed to get *the* Hannibal Lecter to settle down with her. In a way he had, but it was not through any actions on her side. If anyone had the right to be proud of having gotten Hannibal to settle down with another for a longer period of time, that honour would go to Will. Not that he would ever tell Alana that little detail.

The dinners with Jack on the other hand were much more amusing. Jack clumsily tried to trick him into revealing his guilt during every single one of them, while he himself gave him subtle hints that went way over his head.

Jack might be the head of the Behavioural Science Unit and quite good in his own way, but he was neither overly subtle or truly manipulative by nature. He was more akin to a sledge hammer than a sharp, well-honed knife. Nor did he have the knowledge, skills and combination of eidetic memory, inherent darkness and empathy that Will has in spades. However, he knew enough, and had enough experience and knowledge about people to be aware that something was *off*. It made it easy for him to believe that Will had probably been right about Hannibal being the true killer. He just lacked the evidence.

It amused him to serve Jack exotic meats, knowing that Jack believed all of them to come from his victims. He had not tried to take any food home with him after his attempt at the

soiree, but it was clear that he wanted to. The presence of Alana and the humiliation of last time's result had held him off thus far, but he might try again in the future.

He could not wait.

oOo

Dear Will,

I hope this email finds you in good health. I am sorry to hear and see that you did not call me back. I assume it is because of the sheer amount of attention that you have gained?

How are your dogs? Are all of you enjoying the delightful weather and the woods near your house? It is no hardship for me if you ever need someone to watch them in your absence, you trained them well.

I fully forgive you for your part in the attack on my person. I am aware that you only wished to protect Alana from what you perceived as a threat. Your care for your friend and the lengths you are willing to go for the sake of those you consider worthy of your companionship are a fine quality to have. I just hope that you no longer consider me that threat and that we can reconcile.

I heard you are once again working for the FBI, I take it uncle Jack managed to bring you back into the fold? I hope you know that I am always available for you if you need a listening ear. Your seven o'clock appointment is still pencilled in, but you can call me whenever you need me, day and night.

I was invited to join some of the crime scenes, but I was both glad and mournful that I did not see you at them. Glad as it meant that you set some boundaries, mournful because I find the way you perceive the world unique and fascinating. I would like to make it clear that I have no plans to write any papers about your particular way of interpreting the world around you, nor about the way you brain works. In fact, it might make you feel reassured to know that I destroyed all my notes on you.

I recently served a crocodile etouffee. I would have loved to have you for that dinner, both to hear your opinion on the recipe and for your company. Will I be able to welcome you in my humble abode soon?

My kitchen is always open to friends, day and night.
Cordially yours,
Hannibal

oOo

The FBI college had been more than happy to accept him back and had made sure to make it known to all of their students, faculty and the outside world that Will Graham had, in fact, been innocent. They had even gone so far as to publish this information on their public facing website and to actively track down everyone who was foolish enough to respond negatively to the news.

Jack had made it known in the past that the college had been rather reluctant to have their best teacher out in the field and away from the lecture rooms. The enthusiasm in which they welcomed him back showed just how much *they* actually appreciated Will.

From what he had heard, the interaction with his students and his fellow teachers had been awkward at first, but Will had taken to appear in the teachers' lounge more often and the other teachers had tried to make him feel welcomed.

He had also apparently tried to act more friendly, so while a lot of people would still describe him as grumpy and stand-offish, he was no longer described as weird, cold and obsessed with crime scenes. He more often than not met the eyes of the people around him, and he seemed more confident in himself. It helped that he would light and liven up if anyone asked after his dogs.

He was beyond mournful that he could not see these changes for himself. Even though he was a somewhat regular guest a Quantico, there was not a single excuse to drop by the college if Alana was not there. And even if Alana was at the college and even if their breaks did overlap, Alana always tried to keep his preferences with regard to food in mind so they never entered the cafeteria or the teachers' breakroom. It meant he had yet to see Will at Quantico, even in passing.

oOo

Dear Will,

I hope this email finds you in good health. You looked a bit pale and thin in the pictures miss Lounds posted with her article. You are always welcome to join me at my table for a good meal and even better conversations. Or, if it is not too sudden, I could come by and cook for you.

I heard you got a nice compensation from her. I hope you use this money well, with which I mean: on yourself. You deserve a treat, dear Will. If you need any help from me, either with regard to miss Lounds or with anything else, you just need to let me know. I am always here for you.

Will, please reach out to me. I am worried for you, and I miss you, my dear friend. I know you are hurt and I know you blame me, but please, please contact me. Let us talk through our emotions until we see eye to eye once more.

I hope to hear from you soon.
Affectionally yours,
Hannibal

oOo

Freddie Lounds had been one individual who could not leave Will and the past well enough alone. It had not helped that she had not only been pressured into removing all the articles pertaining any information on Will Graham, she had also been made to pay several fines as she had lied under oath and a hefty compensation to Will for her part in the smear campaign.

When she had tried to post a new article on him not long after his freedom, with recently taken pictures of Will, his house and his dogs, she had even been forced to spend a couple of uncomfortable days and nights in a police cell. She had not even managed to get a word out of him as either he had not been aware of her presence, or he had ignored her.

Freddie had gotten served with a restraining order, she had to pay yet a new compensation to Will and she had been turned loose into the world once more. Not once had Will been forced to take action against her. The FBI college had closed ranks around one of their teachers.

The article had been taken down, but he had managed to download the pictures just in time. Will had looked sickly pale due to the lack of decent daylight he had been forced to endure while in the BSHCI and in need of a good meal, but more relaxed than he had ever seen him before. He missed him fiercely.

Freddie tried to put some small digs towards Will in some of her articles about the crime scenes Jack, Alana, he himself, Zeller and Price were seen at, but these articles too disappeared from Tattlecrime not long after they had been posted. In the end, she gave up and choose a new target.

She could no longer write about his favourite topic and her descriptions of his own work were no longer enough to flatter his ego. Unluckily for her, it meant that he placed her card into his rolodex. She was slender and due to her plant-based diet, he knew that he would get a decent cut out of her.

In that same timeframe, Will had published two articles concerning two very specific beetle families living in two entirely different environments and how to use them to determine time of death in those environments. Apparently, he had been working on those experiments before he had been dragged out into the field and his students had helped him out as both a sign of support before his incarceration, and as an apology after his innocence had been proven. Part of the work had been done at the George Washington University, though no co-writers were named.

He had read both of them eagerly and they had been as well-written and as interesting as he had come to expect from the dear profiler. He had made some notes he would have loved to discuss with him, wrote him a letter and sent it towards Will's private mail address, along with some questions concerning his health and his dogs.

He never got a response.

oOo

Dear Will,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I was sorry to see that you have yet to respond to my mails, but though its has been weeks, I understand the need to readjust to the world after the horrible time you have had in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminal Insane. You should have never ended up in there.

I heard from Alana that you are less pale and that you have started to fill out again. I am glad that you are eating healthy. How are your dogs?

Jack brought me glad tidings when he informed me that you are no longer working for him directly but chose to fully focus on your career as a teacher and a scientist. Apparently he did manage to convince you to look into the files, however? If you want, I can drop by to offer a second opinion. It does not matter where you want to meet: my house, your home, Quantico. I am open for any location.

I recently read you articles on the Trogidae and Nitidulidae families and how the individual species and sub-species are influenced by the direct environment around the carcass. I have some questions regarding this topic. Would you be open to have dinner with me and discuss the topic? I know a lovely seafood restaurant near the Chesapeake Bay that would suit you.

I hope to hear from you.
Warmly yours,
Hannibal

oOo

Another secondary source had been the civil lawsuit filed against him with concern to unprofessional conduct and malpractice. It had mainly concerned itself with the fact that he had already been aware of Will's encephalitis and that he had knowingly helped or at least stood by when the now deceased doctor Donald Sutcliff exchanged his brain scan for someone else's scan. While there had been no camera's in the observation room he and Sutcliff had been in, there had been at least one camera in the hallway that had pointed at the door of said room. Those hallways were always monitored as, in the past, patients or their loved ones had attacked doctors when they had not liked the results they had gotten. The camera images were stored away for at least a year in case of claims.

Camera evidence of those hours Will had been in the MRI, taken from multiple angles outside the room, had clearly shown that neither he nor Donald had left the room. That had contradicted Hannibal's officially recorded claim that he had left the room briefly and that Donald must have exchanged the scan results while he had been away. While Will had no actual evidence that Hannibal had truly been aware of the exchange and therefore could not start a criminal case against him, he had enough to start and win a civil case.

As Jack was still suspicious of him and as he was not quite sure what other camera images there might be, Hannibal had not really wanted to take the risk. Alana had been angry with Will for once again going after Hannibal, but Hannibal had just settled and paid the amount demanded.

He was insured for cases of malpractice, after all, and it was not the first time a patient had filed a lawsuit against him. It was expected from every practitioner who was allowed to prescribe medication that they had insurance in case a patient reacted in an unexpected way on the treatment or prescription. More often than not, he actually encouraged his patients to file for compensation as it showed that he too was just a human and was therefore flawed.

In the rare case it was not with his backing, and the *former* patient was in the wrong he still settled. In those cases, he would always take his pound of flesh at a later date. While Will's case was not with his backing, he would rather get his due in a more *pleasant* manner.

He had also not been willing to take the risk that Will might get his hand on some camera material that showed him elsewhere within the hospital.

One of the lawyers had accidently made it known that Will was working on gaining a law degree and was preparing to take his bar examination in the near future. He also stated that this would have been a good case to gain some experience, even though it was one of his own.

He had only interacted with the lawyers hired by Will during the entire case. Not once had Will reached out to him.

oOo

Dear Will,

I hope this letter finds you well. I have decided that I will continue to reach out to you, to show you that while you might need time and space, I will always be here for you.

I will not lecture you and state that one should not push one's friends away. The previous sentence is truly not meant as a passive-aggressive way to influence you. I am aware that you find me manipulative, but I sincerely wish to be honest with you. Your feelings are valid, and if you feel you need space, then space you will have. But please, remember that there are people out there that genuinely care for you. Whatever and whenever you need me, you can reach out to me.

I have attached a recipe for dog biscuits to this letter. I was recently made aware by an acquaintance of mine that canines cannot eat too much at any given time as they might grow too heavy for their joints to carry them healthily. This recipe contains some ingredients with proven benefit for said joints. I am aware that your beloved hounds get plenty of movement, and that you are very careful of what you feed them, but it might help them.

I have also attached some recipes for yourself. I was recently gifted a French gastronomy book which contained some fascinating ways to handle and eat different types of fish. I translated the ones that I thought you might appreciate. I hope you take good care of yourself, dear Will, and that you are hale and happy.

My kitchen and all its ingredients are always at your disposal.

Alana was quite up in arms at your lawsuit against my person. I understand why you filed it and I fully support your choice. I have no hard feelings against you or your lawyers and I will not act against either you or them.
My dear Will, I hope the money will be used on yourself. Use it to buy that boat you told me about, the one you wanted to fix and to sail around the world with. Or treat yourself and your pack of canines to a nice week away. Somewhere up north, perhaps, where there are plenty forests and small brooks?

Take care of yourself Will, and please be aware that I am just a phone call away if you need anything.

Always yours,
Hannibal

oOo

When he had asked her, Alana had told him during one of their dinners at his place that Will had sent her a text message regarding his dogs literally the evening of the day he had been released, but she had not actually seen him. In fact, she actively tried to avoid seeing him.

Will had thanked her for taking in his dogs and had asked when it would be convenient for the hand-over of the dogs, but on the requested time and date it had been a dog-sitting company that had dropped by to take them away. They had had a signed form from Will that he had actually sent them, and they had assured her that the dogs would get back to their rightful owner, but that had been it.

She had not heard from him since, nor had she cared to look for him while in Quantico. As she had been angry and hurt with the profiler for his attempt to murder Hannibal, she had also not been willing to reach out to him in any way, shape or form.

He was aware that while she might never go back to the infatuation she had felt before, her feelings would swing back via guilt towards the need to care for and act as the defender of the seemingly unstable man as soon as her hurt feelings had been soothed away by either his hand or time.

And as some weeks went by after Will regained his freedom and after the outrage at the lawsuit had faded, he saw that change in emotions in her. The anger slowly seeped out of her as he had predicted. It had been sped up by the fact that he had informed her a couple of days after the lawsuit had been settled that Will had only sent Matthew Brown after him in a misguided attempt to protect her, not as vengeance against him. By the time however, she had felt too guilty to reach out to him via text or by calling him.

She was unfailingly kind, and she was deeply concerned for others, but she was also quick to put people into certain categories, very stubborn when she believed she was right and very by the book. She was perceptive, but once she had a opinion and measure of someone, she was not really willing to change that view. He saw it with how she perceived Will, he saw it with how she had perceived Abigail and how saw it in how she perceived him. It helped him immensely and it made her easy to mould and influence.

His action of informing her of that titbit had not been born out of compassion for her. He had mainly done it out of morbid curiosity and horrendously boredom with her and the knowledge that it would make her contact Will. There was also the faint hope that Will would respond to her and that she would convince him in turn to join her at Hannibal's table.

oOo

Dear Will,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. Have you tried the recipes I shared with you yet? I found some additional recipes for you to try, you will find them attached to this letter.

Did you dogs appreciate the snacks? My, fully ethical, butcher can also supply you with cow bones, pluck and skin if you ever have a need for them.

I was recently told about your confrontation with Alana. I apologise if that is not quite the word you would have used, but I could not think of another one to describe what I have been told. I understand you are quite hurt at her actions, and I fully understand your point of view. I remember you telling me that the multiple kisses you shared that evening were mutual, and yet she did not break it off until the last moment. She just claimed you to be too unstable for her taste to ever start a true relationship with. She could have, and should have, told you that before she answered your advances.

Additionally, in her role as psychiatrist, she should have seen that it was clutch for balance, for normality, that made you kiss her in the first place. She failed you, both as the friend she claimed to be and as a doctor.

I promise you, I will do better by you. I will provide you with whatever you need, whenever you need it.
My dear Will, please contact me so we can resume our own relationship, in whatever form you want it to be. There shall be no more secrets, no more lies and no more masks between us. I will vow this to you, in any way you want me to.

I anxiously await your response.
Constantly yours,
Hannibal

oOo

When the anger had left Alana, the guilt returned with a vengeance. It took her a while but she did try to contact Will. As they both tutored FBI's finest at Quantico, she actively tried to connect with him whereas before she had gone out of her way to avoid him.

And reach out to him she did. He had been disappointed that he had not been there that day to be the witness of the meeting as, from all accounts he had been told, Will had told her off quite firmly and had broken off any friendship that might have survived.

Alana had told him parts of it through her tears, but most of it came from the other witnesses and the FBI rumour mill.

Alana had apparently greeted him as if nothing had been wrong, and as if nothing negative had ever taken place between them. As if they did not have a history. She had not even been deterred when Will had just looked up at her absentmindedly, and greeted her with a cool, nearly indifferent, 'Doctor Bloom'.

She truly had managed to corner him. It had been during his break, in the teacher's lounge, with no way out without appearing to be rude and at fault and with a lot of witnesses in the shape of other teachers. He had been marking some essays, while sipping the absolute subpar

drink the FBI sold as coffee. She had sat down next to him with her own coffee, which he had provided for her that morning, and had just started talking to or at him as if she had never gone out of her way to avoid him.

Alana had been her kind and concerned self. She had told Will that he had looked better than he had ever looked before and that she was glad for him that he was no longer actively in the field. She had chided him for still going through the files of active cases and for falling for Jack's forceful demands.

She had then apologised for the fact that she had believed him responsible for the deaths he had supposedly conducted while under influence of an inflammation in the brain, but she had specifically stated that she would not offer an apology for her own actions and her own part in his near conviction. She had truly believed him to be guilty, and therefore he needed to deal with the consequences of his actions.

However involuntary those actions had been and without mentioning the fact that they could have been avoided had the doctors around him actually cared enough to see that it had been a physical issue, not a mental one.

She had also eluded towards the time he had spent at the tender mercies of Frederick Chilton and she had admonished him for his actions against Hannibal. All in all, she had gone right back to acting as if Will was still the unstable, unsociable man who had trouble to meet the eyes of others.

In her perception, now that it was proven that he was not as sociopathic and uncaring as she made herself believe him to be when he had been institutionalised, he was put right back into the category she had put him in before.

From what he had been told, Will had just eyed her with surprise and disbelief in those striking eyes. When she had just kept on looking expectingly at him, he had asked her bluntly what she wanted to achieve by suddenly talking to him after weeks of going out of her way to avoid him or by ignoring him when she could not avoid him. He had appeared vaguely annoyed, but the other teachers had not been sure if that was because of the fact that Alana was suddenly talking to him or because he had been disturbed while reading and grading the essays the students had written. Both had been a fair possibility as, from what Will had told him in the past, some students just really did not know how to write a decent essay.

Those who were aware of his affair with Alana, the fondness for Will that he did not hide and his dislike for rudeness had been quick to assure him that Will had not been rude to her, just very straightforward and direct. Even to them Alana's sudden cornering of and talking to Will had come as a complete surprise.

Alana had blinked at Will, completely blindsided by his reaction to her. In the past, even when he had first been incarcerated, he would have smiled awkwardly at her as he let her keep on talking without ever meeting her eyes. As he was now, she had been forced to meet those mostly uncaring, slightly annoyed, sharp, slate grey eyes that seemed to read into her very soul and that seemed to be capable of determining her every thought. She had been forced to avert her own eyes, no matter how gorgeous those eyes might be.

She had managed to state, somewhat hurt, that she just wanted to be go back to being friends and that she missed talking to him.

Will had finally responded that, looking back on their past interactions, he doubted that what they had had could ever truly be classed as friendship. They had been acquaintances, sure. He had enjoyed spending time with and talking to her while on campus, sure. He had had a crush on her and she was very kissable, sure.

But he had never felt as if he could really talk to her about anything. He had never felt as if she would listen to him without judging. He had always felt as if he had had to walk on egg shells around her. They had never been true friends.

From his point of view, the fact that she had never wanted to be alone with him, that she had mainly wanted to talk about him but never dug deeper than surface level, that she had nearly always left his questions about her unanswered, and that she had strung him along for nearly their entire acquaintanceship made that quite clear.

Had they truly been friends, she would have noticed that he suffered from encephalitis and that the subsequent symptoms and his changed behaviour were clearly been the result of a physical sickness, and not a mental one caused by his work as she had firmly believed until the contrary had been proven.

To him, the relationship they had before had been skewed with him trying to reach out and connect with her, and her both rebuffing him and trying to mother and even cure him. While he might have been antisocial and neurally atypical, there was and had never been anything wrong with him that had to have been cured until the encephalitis had appeared.

Will had told her that he was aware that she had truly cared for him, and might still, but that her perception of him went from viewing him as attractive but awkward and unstable, to callous and cold and capable of murder, to whatever she saw him as now.

So while it had been her right to be upset with him and hurt at his actions, it was also his right to cut off whatever relationship they had had as, to him, it seemed unhealthy for both of them. While he looked fondly back on whatever acquaintanceship they had had in the past, all he could feel for her now was a vague pity and quite some indifference.

He made it clear that he was not angry or unhappy with her, but that he also did not want to go back to whatever they had had before and that he was not feeling up to it to try and create a new connection with her.

He plainly stated that he would prefer it if they could keep it professional from now on.

Alana had quickly nodded and had all but fled the lounge, incredibly hurt by what she had been told.

oOo

Dear Will,

I hope this letter finds you in well. How are you enjoying the spring weather? Have you caught any fish lately? If you have, I would love to take some of your hands. I have recently found some alternative recipes for smoked fish. Of course I will share the fruits of my labour with you in return.

I have attached a book you might like with this letter, hence the lack of new recipes. I was visiting a second hand bookshop last Monday and found this book on laws concerning canines through the ages. It made me think of you.
Have you sat for your bar exam yet?

A little bird told me that you are only present at Quantico for two days a week, and that you work two days a week at the Forensic Faculty at the George Washington University. The website showed me that you have returned to your roots of forensic science. Will we see more articles concerning entomology in the near future?

Have you considered that retreat I mentioned before? I can lend you a cabin I own in Montana when it is not occupied, free of charge. It is surrounded by woods, a small river is nearby and I can promise you that there are no neighbours. Just let me know if you want to make use of it so I can have it stocked for your benefit.

Take care of yourself, my dear Will.

As always, faithfully yours.
Hannibal

oOo

Jack could not tell him much about Will's state of mind and overall health either. While Will was once again working for the FBI college, he had made it very clear that Jack Crawford was not welcome in his lecture hall and that he would not be answered if he tried to call or mail him. If he had a case, he was welcome to bring him the files on the two days a week he was present at Quantico. But only during working hours and *if* he was in his office and not otherwise occupied with his main task as a teacher.

When he had heard that, he *yearned* to drop by the aforementioned office in the hope to see Will.

However, Jack seemed fully incapable of keeping to the boundaries that had been set.
Will had even gone so far as to file an official complaint against him after Jack had dropped by his house, banged loudly onto his door until it had been opened amid a storm of barking dogs and had tried to talk what he considered sense into him. As far as he was aware, this had happened in the fourth week after Will had been *extricated*.

Will had opened the door, but he had just stood there with a stony, emotionless expression on his face while Jack had riled at him. He had the feeling that this had not been the first time that Jack had tried this tactic against Will. More likely than not, the boundaries that Will had set had been caused by a similar incident, probably taking place within his lecture hall, and probably in the presence of his students. He had heard rumours that Jack's reputation had taken a hit somehow within the college.

The way Jack told it, Will had let him finish his rant without interrupting him or showing any emotion whatsoever. However, the only thing he had said in answer when he had had to stop speaking to get his breath back, was that the Behavioural Science Unit still owed him compensation for all the hours he had already made for them and that he would not be assisting them in the future if he kept this up. He had given him some time a week if he was not needed at the college, that was all he would get.

He had firmly closed the door in Jack's face after that. HR had called Jack into their office the next day to tell him off very sternly for harassing Will Graham. Again.

It had also been Jack that had told Hannibal that Will had threatened to take the FBI to court under the tort law for not properly looking into his case. The FBI, too, had folded and settled. Jack had not been able to tell him how much Will had gained out of it, but it could not have been much. He was not truly convicted, so at most he could have gotten the overdue salary plus some interest, a certain amount of hush-money and a compensation for the suffering they indirectly caused by their inaction. It would be a nice sum, but not enough to have him retire any time soon.

Every single meal they had together since Will had been freed of his dreadful imprisonment, Jack would either rant about the lack of Will on crime scenes, or heavily imply that he would appreciate it if Hannibal himself could *convince* Will to re-join the BSU. While he would simply adore to see Will in action once more, he held Jack off.

Dear Will was his mongoose, his treasure. Jack had never and would never appreciate the dear boy as he should be valued.

oOo

My dear Will,

I trust you are well? How are your dogs? Did you like the book I sent you?

As I said when we met at the conference, you look good. I assume I have not caused you any undue stress with my presence? I hope you were treated well by the others. I was sorry that I did not see you on the second day.

As requested, I considered what you said though it pained me greatly to see you in such a state. Therefore, I cannot find it in myself to follow your request. I will just have to work harder to convince you of my honesty when it comes to my feelings and regard for you. Though it was at least partially with the best intentions for you in mind, I have hurt you grievously in the past. I will do anything I can to make it up to you. Anything. Even at risk of my freedom, even at abject danger to myself, just tell me what to do.

My dear, darling Will, you truly are exceptionally close to my heart. I seldom open my kitchen to those around me, but it is even more rare that I go out of my way to care for the pets of others. I do not say this to make myself seem manipulative or selfish. I just say this to show how remarkable you are. I am aware that you only believed me to want to gain access to your extraordinary brain and way of thinking. While I find your mind endlessly fascinating, it is only just one part of you that appeals to me. Your intelligence, your beauty, your simple

desires, the way you observe and understand the world around you, the fact that you can see me for whom I truly am and do not look away or show any fear. All of it is immensely appealing. I just want you in my life, in any way you will allow.

You are my Muse, my Beatrice, though I prefer you profane and not deified. I want to show you the world, and I want to show the world your glorious self the way I perceive you.

I am aware that I might sound obsessive, especially as you rejected me quite firmly. But a connection such as ours only rarely appears and I will fight for it. That is a promise, and I always keep my promises.

Dear Will, just tell me what to do.

Eagerly awaiting your response.
Truly yours,
Hannibal

PS: Please be aware that if I do not receive a response, I will visit you at your home. This is not a threat and I do not wish to antagonise you, I will never harm or hurt you or your canine companions. Even if you are not in, I will wait however long I need nonetheless.

The Becoming of Alana Bloom

Chapter Notes

This chapter/ short story takes place long before Alana or Hannibal has ever met Will. Enjoy!

Next up: The Dinner. To be posted next weekend.

The choked off, feminine cry followed immediately by a crash coming from the treatment room did not startle him as it did the others. He had been anticipating it, after all, though even he had not expected it to start within the first fifteen minutes of the session. Another thump of furniture being violently moved sounded and the others flinched back as if they were to ones that had been hit.

Muted as it was by the flimsy, standard-issue hospital door, it was clear that something was going terribly wrong with the psychotherapy going on within. As it concerned a slight, meek, mostly passive male in his early twenties with a case of depression who had requested help, the screams and crashes should not be happening as far as the others were aware.

He was probably the only one that had deduced that it was not *just* a depression, but that verbal abuse hidden as concern by mainly female family members had aggravated some type of inborn mental instability the patient had to have kept hidden since he became self-aware. He had only briefly spoken to the young man before he had decided to hand him over to the aspiring female psychiatrist.

In those brief ten minutes he had easily seen that the other male was on the razor edge of violence either against himself or against someone else, mainly one of the female family members. It had taken only a couple of words to light the fuss and to have it triggered by any *female* who showed concern. The fact that it would be genuine concern was not something that the slight male would notice in his compromised state. He just wondered whatever came out of the particular chrysalis would end up trying to harm or kill either itself or whoever was near him. It would be such a disappointment if it was to be neither.

He turned towards the door, curious to see what the promising Alana Bloom would do. He kept his expression calm and aloof, but let slight worry appear in the crease of his forehead. It would not do to break his mask on such a *exiting* occasion such as this.

Unlike the other three students present, Alana was fully neurotypical which meant that she *might* act in a way he had not fully predicted. That, combined with the fact that she was beautiful, intelligent and promising had made her an ideal candidate to mentor.
But she would break and she would become. This situation he had created especially for her was just the final stop on the road to her metamorphosis into her true self. He just hoped that

she would mutate into something interesting. And if not? She would still have her uses beyond what amusement he could get out of her.

“What-?” One of his other students started to ask alarmed, but a second, pained shout, this one masculine, and the sound of furniture being forcefully moved interrupted him. The others present looked nervously at him. He could see the shakiness that had been caused by the sounds coming from within the room and the way they *needed* him to take charge.

Hopeless, all of them. These three would never amount to anything more than to become garden-variety psychologists hired by bored housewives in need of any type of excitement. Not unlike the majority of students he had had in his classes, they had only decided to study psychiatry to understand why they were different from everyone else in their environment. They were not, but their pathetic, tiny sense of individuality would not survive his honest impression of them. Most of them were so easy to break and to mould towards his wishes. It was beyond *dull*, so he did not even put effort into it. Still, they worshipped the very ground he walked on when he did pay attention to them.

A third cry sounded, this time followed by the sound of something or someone hitting the equally flimsy walls.

“Do- do we need to help her?” he was asked fearfully.

He calmly raised his left arm, turned his wrist and slipped down the sleeves of both his jacket and his dress shirt a bit to look at his watch. He did not need it to determine the time, but as everything else within his public-facing life, he lowered himself to allow others to believe him to have flaws.

“Let us give her another minute,” he stated calmly, easily deepening the concerned frown between his eyebrows, “we *did* discuss in one of our lessons how to deal with a panicked patient. As I told you in that particular lecture, in some cases well-meaning help might worsen the situation and bring it out control.”

The others nodded, but it was clear that it had shaken them to the core. He clinically concluded that at least one of them would leave the program before the end of the day.

The minute seemed to last, and every second could be felt, even by him. He noticed with some disgust and faint amusement that sweat had started to appear on two foreheads, and he could smell their trepidation. All three students had flinched when at about forty-five seconds into the wait a broken gasp could he heard.

At exactly one minute he rose from his seat, a plastic chair provided by the hospital, and made his way towards the door. He knocked politely before he opened the door.

It was chaos within, as he had expected. The two chairs had been thrown aside and were laying on their side. The treatment bench had been toppled and one of its legs was bend. The desk had been emptied of everything on it and had been shoved aside. The open laptop had been thrown against the wall and its screen had shattered. Alana’s notebook and pen were near the corner farthest away from the door. The tip of the pen was lighly coated in blood.

But the main subject of the drama taking place was without doubt the slim young man looming over the equally slight young woman cowering with her arms over her head in the corner, a shard of dark glass in his bleeding hand. It seemed as if the odds had landed in favour of violence against others, after all.

It was clear that the young man had launched himself at Alana, without any visible or verbal trigger that she would have been aware off. She and her chair would have toppled over immediately. That had been the first crash and scream.

From the marks around her slight neck, it seemed as if he had tried to strangle her, which explained the fact that the first cry had become choked off. To get away from him, Alana had stabbed him with her pen in the right upper arm. That had let to the second shout. The third scream had come from Alana once again, just before she had been pushed against the wall. From the red marks on her face and arms, she had taken some blows though none had been caused by the makeshift weapon.

Her patient seemed disappointingly unharmed however. Except for the stab wound caused by the pen, she had not retaliated whatsoever. The blood dripping from his hand came from the shard he was holding quite tightly.

He slowly entered the room, clearly telegraphing his movements and keeping his arms along his body and his palms open and turned towards the front. It seemed he had to deescalate the situation after all, how unfortunate.

“Please step away from doctor Bloom, Timothy,” he soothingly requested. The young man turned wild eyes upon him.
“It is not the good doctor you are upset with, Timothy,” he continued calmly, “no one here will attack you in any way. You are safe, Timothy, no one will insult you. There is nothing wrong with you. You are not damaged in any way, Timothy, you are worth something.”

The young man seemed to relax under the litany of soft words and the reassurance of his own worth. He kept up the stream of words as he slowly made his way deeper in to the room.

The soft sound of glass hitting carpet sounded when he skirted the bench. The patient had relaxed his hand and had dropped his weapon. The situation was successfully deescalated.

“That’s it,” he murmured softly as he came to a halt an arm’s length away from him, “you did good Timothy. May I touch you?”
The young man nodded. He had started to shake now that the adrenaline had left his system.

He took the last step forward and into his space. He slowly raised his right arm and softly touched the other male’s left, unharmed upper arm with it. When he did not flinch away, he put more pressure on the arm and slowly slid his hand towards his left shoulder.
He turned his own body and he gently forced the slighter man to turn away from Alana.

After that, it was easy to lead the young patient out of the room and into a different treatment room. He bound his wounds and ensured him that he had not done anything wrong and that the female psychiatrist in training was currently being treated and that she would be alright. He gave him a sedative and left him asleep on the treatment bench.

Alana had emerged from the corner she had been cowering in when he returned to the first treatment room. One of the other students had looked her over, but beyond the blows she seemed unharmed. She appeared shaken and her eyes were glassy with both tears and shock. Her face was pale were the red marks of violence was not blooming. Her body was shaking somewhat fiercely, and her hair and clothing was a mess of creases and tangles.

She seemed relieved to see him, and the trembling of her limbs seemed to slow down gradually the closer he came. He could see the adoration beyond the mere crush she had had on him before the event and the hero worship shining in her eyes.

Her breaking had been absolute, but her becoming had turned out to be a disappointment. She had been predictable and *dull*, she had reacted just like the rest of the mindless sheep. Oh well, it had livened up his afternoon.

The Dinner: of Boundaries and Hypocrisy

Chapter Notes

> The chapter's title will give something about Hannibal and his behaviour in future chapters away... Beyond that, it might appear like a filler, but it has some important aspects for Will's part.
> Enjoy!
>
> Without giving any spoilers, I can promise you that Will has a much larger role in the next chapter.
> To be posted next weekend: the Dream

"Ah, Jack, good evening. Come in," he greeted his guest. The other man stood with his customary dark hat in his hands, the look in his eyes showed him to be preoccupied and his suit was creased from a long day at work. That alone told him something about the day the FBI head of the Behavioural Science Unit had had, and it was a deviation of what had become the norm over the last couple of months.

It appeared as if Jack Crawford had driven towards his home directly from the FBI's office in Quantico, but he faintly smelled the trace scents of wood and dogs on him. A quick scan showed numerous hairs from several breeds of dogs on the lower half of his dark slacks to be the culprit of the smell he perceived.

He had been having dinner on a weekly basis with the very suspicious agent for little over six months now, but their friendly acquaintanceship had been sour for at least the last two of them. Will's firm convictions about him being the Chesapeake Ripper had hit some mark, but the FBI had no evidence and no just cause or reason to gain a search warrant.

While he did not enforce a dress code during informal dinners such as these, Jack and Alana always changed out of the clothing they had worn during their day. He was not quite sure why, but he appreciated the absence of the overly sterile smell of the morgue they tended to carry whenever he met up with them during business hours. He himself never redressed for dinner unless he had gone swimming or lifted *weights* before he started cooking. Will, the rare times he had agreed to join him for dinner, had not done so either though he had made sure to remove any dog hairs before he stepped into his house.

"Evening doctor Lecter," he was greeted in return and the agent stepped inside. He had actually expected Will to join this particular dinner at the forceful behest of dear uncle Jack, but the other man had come alone. Will had been out of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminal Insane for over four weeks now, and Jack had hinted heavily that he would bring him along to their weekly dinner when they had spoken just three days ago.

He had looked forward to seeing and talking to the younger man again. He had also anticipated a nice evening filled with conversation that neither Alana nor Jack would be able to keep up with. Teasing insinuations only Will would have caught, a wide variety of topics only Will would have enough knowledge of to challenge him on, and of course the fact that the young teacher could surprise even him. It had all been enough to actually make him impatiently await that very dinner.

“Please, call me Hannibal,” he told him with a small smile, one that he made sure was just as visible in his eyes as it was around the corners of his mouth. He was aware that he mainly showed micro expressions, but he had trained himself under the guidance of his lovely aunt to make them appear genuine, though they rarely were sincere.

As always, Jack just inclined his head with a soft murmur of his first name. They followed the same steps of their song-and-dance as they had for the last two months, however the lack of a certain special agent made the evening seem particularly bleak to him.

The agent complimented him on the smell of the food currently cooking in his kitchen as he took and hung his overcoat, they made civil small talk about mundane topics as their respective days and the weather as he guided him towards the dining room, and Jack politely greeted Alana before he sat down at his designated seat. He offered him wine, the other accepted, he filled his glass with the light, fruity malbec he had already decanted for this particular meal and left the dining room so Jack and Alana could catch up.

It was all routinely dull, but needs must. It was such a shame Will had not joined them.

oOo

“You mentioned Will would be joining us this fine evening the last time we spoke. He could not make it?” he asked Jack after they had finished the first course, a lovely Japanese styled charcuterie platter with sashimi style raw meats and fish combined with multiple light sauces. As always, he only had answered with either a yes or a no when his guests attempted to guess what the meat and fish were. He had little doubt that Will would have guessed most of the species of fish he had served correctly. His promised presence had been one of the reasons he had chosen this particular first course.

Jack took a large gulp of his red wine in what appeared to be exasperation. Alana took a nearly undignified, reproaching sniff of her own wine though it was not immediately evident to him if it was because Will had been mentioned or because of Jack’s conduct towards the younger man.

Jack had a rather *firm* character. If something did not fit within the world as he understood it, he reacted with force and even violence. The way Will saw the world often left the older agent frustrated as he could not connect the dots the evidence painted for Will. Sadly for the head of BSU as it was a terrible flaw to have, that lack of comprehension outed itself in raised voices, lost tempers, and intimidation attempts.

“He did not let me finish my request for him to join tonight,” the agent said almost sourly as he stared into his wine, “in fact, he kicked me out.”
“He… kicked you out?” Hannibal could not help but ask dubiously. Will could be somewhat

prickly, antisocial, and he could be defensive of both his mental and physical space, but he was never truly *rude*. His manners might not be as refined as his own, but Will could not be considered boorish.

Jack grimaced, "I visited him at home before I came here, as it is a Wednesday."
That explained the presence of the work related clothing, the scent of wood and dogs and the dog hair on his slacks. He had, wrongfully it seemed, assumed that Will had agreed to accompany Jack to their weekly dinner when the latter had mentioned that he would bring him as his plus one.

Jack's elaboration, however, did not justify or clarify why he visited Will at his house or why he gave the non sequitur about the current day of the week. He made a questioning sound as he gently inhaled the delightful scent of his own glass of wine.
"Will only works for the Academy on Mondays and Tuesdays," Alana told him, "I am not quite sure what he does with the rest of the week."

"Probably spend the money he got from the higher-ups," the only formal agent present grumbled, "or let people he could have saved die."
"Jack-," Alana, ever the defender of the perceived weak, started to chide him, but the agent just glowered at her.

"He could help with all of those cases," he stated beleaguered and outraged, "but no, he is only available on the Mondays and Tuesdays when he is in his office. Even then he might not look at the case I brought him *and* he demands a flat fee per case I bring to him. A flat fee for a couple of minutes of work!"

"Let me confirm if I understand what you are saying," he stated slowly as he lowered his wine. The picture painted by Jack's words was not a pretty one, and he felt something akin to anger stir, "Will set boundaries and made it clear that he is willing to work as a consultant – not unlike what Alana and myself are doing and what we are paid for – on Mondays and Tuesdays when he is not teaching?"

The head of the BSU just nodded as he took another gulp of his wine. He felt his own nostrils flare, but that was the only visible sign of his intense aversion of both the disregard for the quality wine and the other man's sheer disdain for both Will and the set restrictions.

He carefully places his glass down and neatly placed his hands under the table on his lap. It would not do for his guests to see the clench of his fists, or to break the wineglass and spill the precious liquid it contained.

"You then decided to ignore those set boundaries by visiting Will at his home, on a day he is not working for the FBI, to attempt to force him to work one or multiple cases for you?" he kept his voice carefully neutral, "or to join you for an outing while unaware what it entailed?"

Jack forcefully put his nearly empty glass down and visibly had to restrain himself as he nearly snarled, "Will Graham helped us solve multiple cases and catch incredibly *vile* killers within days that normally would have taken weeks or even months. It is his *duty* to help us solve those cases!"

“You just stated that he is still willing to help you solve cases, on Mondays and Tuesdays, during normal business hours and for a fee,” he stated cooly before he rose from his seat, “allow me to get the next course.”

He desperately needed a moment to breath before he did something *impulsive*.

oOo

“I am curious about something you mentioned,” he said as he carefully cut a piece of chuck roast, twirled it into the sauce, and added some of the green asperge tips onto his fork, “Will got money from the FBI?”
He placed the combined bite into his mouth and shot Jack a questioning look even as he savoured the flavours.

“He threatened to sue them,” Jack answered as he lowered his fork. To his secret delight, it appeared as if he was glad for an excuse not to eat the meat in front of him as he was clearly *wary* of the actual origin and specie. It truly was beef this course, as he had had no time to *hunt* for a decent roast. The same could not be said for the sashimi.

“It is hush money,” Alana chimed in before she took a dainty bite of her own dinner, “they knew they were in the wrong, but they didn’t want it mentioned in the media. Hence, they paid him. The rumours state that it is not that much though, as he is still working.”
“He might have gotten more if he had taken them to court?” he asked delicately, aware of the sensitivity of the topic.

“Probably not,” Jack said almost bitterly with a shrug as he picked up his fork and speared a asperge, “but it is still a decent enough amount.”
“So, he got money from the FBI and from Freddie Lounds, he sued Chilton, and he sued you, Hannibal,” Alana said curiously, though slight worry was present, “what is he doing with the money he got?”

“He *sued* you?” Jack’s head shot towards him with an almost painful sounding crack and his dark eyes were wide in shock. He lowered his fork to pick up his wine as he briefly lamented the fact that the sound created by the abuse the bones in the other man’s neck were treated to was not actually caused by his hand and he that could not resolve that issue anytime soon.

“It was a medicolegal case,” he admitted with a careless gesture of his hand. It was not quite the truth, but he did not care for Jack to look into the details of the case, “as a former surgeon I should have recognised the signs of encephalitis. He was right, so I settled. Frederick, on the other hand, was prosecuted as he was still getting royalties for an article about Will he should have had withdrawn the moment Will was acquitted.”

He hid his faint smile behind his glass, before he lightly said, “though I do wonder. Will could have easily left all of *this* behind as the accumulated compensations are more than enough to start a new life elsewhere. Somewhere he is not known or recognised on sight. Somewhere he is not bothered by familiar faces turned disdainful. Why hasn’t he?”

oOo

The dinner party easily died down not too long after they had finished the lovely but simple panna cotta he had served with a sauce made out of homemade marmalade, dark chocolate and just the slightest amount of the precious life giving liquid his latest victim had so easily shared with him.

“The food was delicious as always, doctor,” Jack complimented him formally when he walked him out. He paused by the door and turned back towards him, “I will try and talk Will into joining me sometime soon. See if the two of us can convince him to actively help out on cases again.”

He gave him a tight smile in response. While he would appreciate Will’s presence, he rather preferred it to be voluntary and not forced by the likes of Jack Crawford. Especially if the only objectives behind the compelled accompaniment were nefarious ones.
He also felt strongly disapproved of the disregard the FBI agent held for Will as a person and the words that he spoke.

“Have a good evening, Jack,” was all he said, “as always, please do not hesitate to contact me if my expertise is needed. Send Bella my regards.”
“Will do,” the dark skinned man said as he stepped out of the door, “good night.”

He closed the door behind the other and, uncharacteristic for him, leant his back against it for a long moment. He closed his eyes and forced himself to breathe through his nose to dispel the simmering anger Jack had caused by his careless words throughout the dinner and the disdain he had shown for someone he considered dear to him. He might not have seen Will for nearly two months, but that did not dissipate his worth to him.

With one last long exhale, he pushed himself ungracefully away from the door and walked into the depths of his house. Alana was waiting for him.

A Profiler to Dream About

Chapter Notes

Will finally shows up... In a way ;)
Enjoy!

To be posted next weekend: A Lackadaisical End

He woke up to rough, sloppy, lazy kisses being pressed to his naked right shoulder, the lips chapped and thin. An arm lay heavily over his right side and across his chest and his legs were firmly entwined with another, equally naked pair. A calloused hand with blunt nails lightly pet through the hair on his naked chest. A pair with more muscularity at the thigh and calf areas, but less hairy than his own. The body behind him was masculine and strong, but built differently than his own.

He hummed in indolent pleasure as the lips surrounded by coarse facial hair moved away from his shoulder in a sensual smear until a slightly pointed nose was buried in the fine hairs at the base of his skull.

“Finally awake, are you. Feeling your age?” was stated playfully, though muffled. He could feel the, as far as he could determine it, fond smile against the curve of his neck, “I know *you* dragged the deadweight around, but really, you bragged that his bulk was easier to handle than I am on a good day.”

He turned himself around, a bit mournful when he had to untangle their legs and the arm slid away, to look into the gorgeous, happily gleaming, *loving*, slate grey eyes of Will Graham for once not hidden by the offensive, unneeded glasses. He was instantly smitten with the bed hair and the warm crinkles around those eyes that he was met with.

“Or maybe I am just indulging in the fact that I have such a beautiful, angelic specimen in my bed,” he replied hoarsely before he nuzzled their noses together tenderly. He could feel Will’s huffy laughter against his own face and he delighted in it.

“Is that so?” his dear Will murmured coyly in reply as he ghosted his lips over his. It only became clear to him at that moment that both were fully naked, and both were at least slightly aroused, “what do you plan to do about it?”

He hooked his own leg over both of Will’s and turned them over until he was on top. Will did not make it easy for him as he struggled against his hold, and by the time he succeeded both were smiling and very much ready for more *advanced* bed play. His darling’s eyes were laughing up at him, though the pupils were dilated and he could feel his arousal. He easily slotted himself between the v formed by Will’s legs and pressed his own pelvis down.

“Keep you here for a while longer, of course,” he deadpanned distracted between lazy sucking kisses pressed to the slender neck presented to him.

oOo

He was standing in his kitchen, cooking breakfast, as Will’s arms slid around his waist and his hands interlocked low on his stomach. His thumb nails were lightly scratching at the pattern knitted in the soft, maroon coloured wool in an absentmindedly manner. He inhaled unconsciously, even as he rested back against a deceptively broad chest. He vaguely registered that he smelled freshly showered and the scent of his shampoo and body wash matched nicely with Will’s own. It always made him heady to smell his claim on Will.

“What’s for breakfast?” Will softly said as he just stood there and loosely embraced him. He was distantly aware that Will would have started to rock them gently had he not held a knife and was currently cutting into a piece of liver. The darling leaned lightly around him to peer down at his cutting board, “is that from our hunt yesterday?”

He hummed a toneless sound in the back of his throat in reply, too occupied with the delightful warmth as his back. He felt Will move slightly to look around him at the other ingredients he had collected. Eggs, fresh herbs, and bacon had been beaten, cut and sliced and were ready to be used.

“Are you making a scramble?” he asked delighted, “what is the occasion?”
“I felt like celebrating our successful expedition from last night,” he said lightly, lovingly in response.

Alarm bells were however going off in a distant part of his brain. Since when were simple protein scrambles only for commemorations? Yes, he had made something similar on the day he had first fed Will, and yes, that would be something he would do. But a scramble of all things? And if he did feel like honouring something, why the use of liver over lungs or sausages? He ignored it in favour of the soft slide of hands over his waist, meant to reassure, not too arouse.

“You were suddenly far away,” Will muttered in his ear, “where did you go?”
“Nowhere, my dear Will,” he delighted in calling him that, and it chased the dark thoughts out of his mind, “just wondering.”
“Oh?” Will hummed even as he shifted slightly to look him in the eye. Those beautiful eyes were darkened with concern as they met his own.

“Nothing to worry about,” he sussed him, even though it was obvious to him that Will was only slightly alarmed at his behaviour. He decided to take a stab in the dark, “just mourning the fact that the lungs were not up to par.”

His eyes lightened back into that beloved slate grey colour as fond adoration replaced the concern.
Will huffed another one of those laughs he was so enamoured with before he teasingly said, “so pretentiously romantic.”
“Only for you,” he promised lowly, infatuated, in return.

oOo

The market they were strolling over was busy, but it had fairly gotten the reputation of having some of the best products in the surrounding area and most people present were polite or kept to themselves so the crowd could be tolerated.

Everything present – from vegetables, to eggs, to meat, to the flowers – was freshly taken from the rural lands by the farmers themselves on that very same morning of the market day, and while the prices were slightly higher than what one would pay in the supermarket, the quality of the produce was infinitely more superior.

Will was softly, gently ribbing him about his uppity, snobby dislike of supermarkets but he let it slide with a delighted, probably besotted smile aimed at his love. They were holding hands as if it was normal for them and Will had actually dragged him to two different stands as if he knew his way around the roofed, wooden market hall.

It was a gorgeous building with sturdy wooden beams in matted greens and browns and heavy, handmade glass. It was relatively old compared to most of the region and delightfully open and connected to the nature adjacent to it. Woods surrounded a solid half of the environment, and grassland with horses, cattle and sheep the rest. The only unnatural part was the car park and the road leading towards the market hall. Will, for all his teasing, *adored* it.

Both of them were dressed different from what they would normally wear. He himself was wearing a very humble, slightly faded black, two-piece suit with a white dress-shirt and a slate-grey tie. His brogues were shined, but slight wear could be seen. He did not care however as Will was dressed somewhat similarly, though without the suit's jacket. His tie was a subtle maroon, his dress shirt was a nice, light blue and his slacks were a tailored, dove-grey. He looked lovely.

Hand in hand, they walked from stand to stand. Sometimes they greeted one of the stand holders, sometimes they bought something that was added to the basket he was wearing on his free arm.

The weather was pleasantly sunny but not too warm, they were both laughing and smiling and flirting, and the procedure he found was to his satisfaction. It was all so very domestic and so very lovely.

It was a good day.

oOoOoOo

He awoke to gentle kisses being pressed against his naked chest, the lips soft and thin. The arm casually slung over his waist was very lightly muscular but thin, the hand gently petting his chest was womanly and soft with slightly pointed nails. The legs intertwined with his own were smooth, barely muscular and delicate. He was dressed in his silk sleep trousers. His face felt both curiously wet and unexpectedly rigid in places. His mouth was dry, and his tongue felt *unfettered*.

It confused him for a brief moment as he tried to get his bearing back. Will, where was his darling Will? He made a wounded noise in his distress and the long-fingered, uncalloused hand stopped its soothing and the arm tightened slightly around him.

“Are you alright,” a feminine voice asked him in concern, “you were crying and shaking.”
“I- yes,” he managed to say somewhat steadily. He was sure that he was the only one to hear his voice break, “just a nightmare. Excuse me.”

He easily extracted himself from the clingy arms and the grip of delicate, unbecoming weak legs. Whereas it had taken some effort within his dream – nightmare? – to even flip his companion, he had no trouble whatsoever to get away from the one in real life.

He walked towards his wardrobe and grabbed the first sweater he could find. Ironically, it was a very nice cashmere, *slate grey* one that reminded him too much of Will at the moment. He felt tears make their way down his already damp and sticky cheeks.

Alana had sat up on the bed while he had put on his top, not even conscious of her own state of undress, and he could easily read the wish to comfort him in her posture. That was the last thing he wanted after the particular dream he had just had.

“Do you-,” she started to ask but he interrupted her roughly, even rudely. He could not bare to look at her.
“No,” he forced out through gritted teeth, before he gentled his tone, “not right now, thank you. I just want to be alone for a moment. Go back to sleep, I will be fine.”

He left his bedroom before she could respond and gently, silently closed the door. She might adhere to his wishes, she might decide to follow him. He would deal with her the moment her decision came into existence. For now, he wanted to both bask in the lovely dream he had just had, and to feel bitterly, mournfully disappointed by the fact that it was not actually the reality of his life.

That, and he felt beyond reassured by the fact that at least *part* of his dream – dreams? – had not shown up in reality. That one part of the dream, however fragmented and incomplete it had been, had been more arousing than anything he had ever shared with Alana, and it felt wrong to have it accredited to her. Maybe the overly romantic notion that everything felt better and brighter while with the one you loved had some truth in it after all.

He made his way towards his living room and sank heavily down onto his sofa. He rested his arms on his knees in a posture he so rarely allowed himself to adopt as he stared absentmindedly into the unlit fireplace.

He was mainly severely disappointed in himself and his loss of control. He should have realised that the dream was fake. The time jumps should have been the first clue. He had had no awareness concerning how he had gone from the bedroom, to the kitchen, to getting showered and dressed, to the drive towards the market… He was both confident and self-aware enough that there was very little he did not remember.

The lack of true scents should have been a sign too. Like his memory, he was proud of his olfactory skills. He should have realised that he had not been able to smell Will’s breath, or

the aroma of his cooking, or the fragrance of the flowers in the market. All scents he had believed he had smelled, were ones he had tried to imagine on Will before.

Unless he needed a good *reason*, he always made sure to be up and about and ready for the day far before his paramour awoke. He had however worked long enough hours in the hospitals to be intimately aware that people generally smelled *stale* when they first wakened after several long hours of resting. He normally greatly disliked the odour on his affair and requested that they shower and brush their teeth before they greeted him in the morning, but he was sure that he would have *adored* either of the scents on Will. He was pathetically aware that he had changed him that much.

There were other small indicators that he had neglected to consider. The bed he had shared with Will had been located in his old room in Lecter Castle, the kitchen had been in his apartment in Florence, that particular farmer's market had been closed down long before he had met Will when a fire had destroyed the old, wooden venue.

Even the clothing he had been wearing in most of it should have given some rise for alarm. The knitted sweater he had been wearing had been a gift from his aunt when he had been fourteen and gangly. He had accidently destroyed it during a hunt-gone-wrong a little over two years later, though it had been a tight fit at his shoulders, his biceps and his hips for quite some time before that disastrous event. The suit, the tie and the brogues he had been wearing while at the market had been the exact same as he had worn when he had first disembarked in the United Stated of Amerika. The dress shirt Will had been wearing had been one he had seen and admired with him in mind during a tailoring session. He had never bought it for him, though he had been tempted.

He rested his chin on his laced together hands, for once without his normal rigid posture and straight back and not caring that Alana might see him as less than perfect. He laughed out loud, and the sound echoed hollowly and empty through the warmly, artfully, and stylishly furnished space.

It seemed as if Will was fully taking over his mind palace. He was slowly but surely appearing wherever and whenever he wanted, without either of them knowing. The *nightmare* showed him that much, and he had never been one to deny himself of any truths, no matter how ugly or painful they were.

How long could he keep on going like this? How long could he string Alana along before she truly started to make *demands*? How long before his longing for Will's companionship would make him act *drastically*?

He just knew he missed his dear, darling Will terribly and that he would *love* nothing more that to make that dream reality.

A Lackadaisical End

Chapter Notes

> Day early, but I have an incredibly busy weekend coming up. Hannibal finally gets some action... Warning for violence and a death.
>
> To be posted next weekend: the Conference. Will will show up in person for that one!

She woke up slowly, but not in the luxurious way she had expected. The bed beneath her felt strange against her body. In places it was too hard, while in other parts of her body she couldn't sense it at all. In fact, she felt quite disoriented. She groaned in discomfort, but didn't open her eyes just yet.

The groan came out muted and sounded strange to her ears. Her head hurt and she felt dizzy. How much had she consumed yesterday? She couldn't remember having had more than one glass of her favourite. Had she been drugged? It couldn't be, she was always so very careful. She had to be, what with her job and the sick and twisted individuals she wrote about.

She could sense that it was cold around her. While she preferred to sleep naked, she always made sure that she was covered by as many sheets and blankets as was needed and that the air conditioning was set to a reasonable temperature like twenty degrees centigrade. Whatever she currently felt was far below that.

She shuddered, or at least she tried to. She felt weirdly numb all over. Just how long had she been laying in this damnable cold? Why hadn't she woken up? She tried to move her hand, but it barely twitched.

She had checked into that more expensive hotel, hadn't she? A nice way to treat herself after she had finally gotten over that clusterfuck with Graham. Especially now that she slowly started to regain her reputation again and the good people of the law enforcement started to forget her pretty features. She might no longer be able to write about him, but there were enough other killers out there.

In fact, the latest one was going to make her rich. He might not be the Chesapeake Ripper, that particular serial killer was always popular with her readership, nor did he have the same talent for theatrics and mimesis, but he had quite the nice flair for dramatics regardless. Sadly enough, the Ripper had disappeared of the face of the earth after his latest kill had freed Graham. Even worse, she had been forced to remove all of her articles she had written about his last handful of victims as she had mentioned a certain, overly creepy special agent in them.

She didn't believe for one second that Frederick Chilton – feeble-minded, arrogant, blustering Frederick Chilton – was the Chesapeake Ripper. He had been a terrible surgeon, and he was both a terrible psychiatrist and a terrible liar. He was a braggart, a walking hazard for his patients and a fraud, but he was no killer. Not directly, anyway. He probably had caused some deaths due to sheer negligence and his own incapability.

No, it was much more likely Graham was actually right. Which meant that the Chesapeake Ripper was still out there and that it potentially was Hannibal Lecter who was the elusive killer. His obsession with meat-based food, his entire attitude and his skills made him a much likelier suspect.

However, she had noticed during her *research* on him that his social agenda was always completely filled. If Alana Bloom was not at his place, than Jack Crawford was. On the days that he wasn't entertaining either, he went out to the opening evenings of music pieces or art exhibitions or to fundraisers. He just didn't have the time to go on a murder spree.

And yet, Graham had been very adamant that Lecter was both the Copycat and the Ripper. She could no longer compare the pictures of the different scenes however, as she had been forced to remove all of them. Because that twitchy, unstable menace had been in most of the articles she had written about those killing grounds. And even if he hadn't been, Lecter's lawyers had been just as thorough as the FBI had been.

It still surprised her to this day that Crawford's bloodhound had in fact *not* been as neutered as she had believed. The freak had shown his metaphorical *teeth* after he had gotten out. She still fully believed that he deserved to be locked away. She didn't care whatever it was the others thought, he was too good at describing how murders went down and how it felt. She didn't care for the statement that a good profiler can think like a killer. It sounded like the kind of excuse a murderer would give. She would eat her gorgeously kept ringlets if he had not murdered at least *one* person before he shot Hobbs or mutilated at least one animal. His regards of his dogs be damned, he was probably that good a psychopath to give a show he cared for them.

She sluggishly and blearily opened her eyes, only to be met with distorted light and dark shapes. She blinked slowly. It felt as if she had to fight against something very viscous just to move her eyelids. She fuzzily looked up at the peculiar darkness that was around her, only to realise long moments later that her eyes were once again closed.

She opened them again and realised that her surroundings had become far more clear. Her head still hurt, and her mind felt slow and hazy. The very bright spot shining directly in her eyes didn't really help. She squinted up at it. She was quite sure that *that* particular light hadn't been in her fancy hotel room.

Had she fallen asleep in the bath? That would explain the lamp, the cold, the weirdly hard surface she was resting on, and the plastic curtains around her. She turned her head to the right and looked befuddled at the opaque material that surrounded the area where she was currently laying. There had not been a plastic shower curtain in the bathroom, she was sure of it. It just didn't fit with the ambiance and the price of the room. Also, since when was a bath fully surrounded by shower curtains?

She turned her head back towards the light, it felt as if it had become easier to move parts of her body, and peered up at it and towards the ceiling. That was not a lamp that fit within the setting of the grand chamber either. In fact, it reminded her of something she might find at a dentist or a doctor.

She tried to move her hand again, and nearly sighed in relieve as she realised that she could move it at least a slight bit closer to her thigh. Whatever had happened or was happening to her was slowly receding. She tried to lift her head to check upon the rest of her body, but found it too heavy still. Instead, she opted to slowly move it to the left. She could vaguely see some tiles through the mostly opaque curtains but either they were too far away, or her eyes or head was still too fuzzy and off for her to determine the colour.

Soft rustling and the sound of metal on stone came from her right and she carefully turned her sore head towards that side. A shape, made blurry by the bad lighting and the curtains, was making its way towards her. She opened her mouth to say *something*, not call for help as that might only *satisfy* whoever it was, but only a soft croak would leave her. Her tongue felt heavy, dry, and numb, and her lips wouldn't move the way they were supposed to. She could barely open her mouth as it was.

She doubted that whoever it was could have heard her, but the figure came closer anyway. The rattling of whatever it was the person was pushing or pulling came to a stop near the approximate location of her head, and the curtain was neatly brushed aside to provide space for someone to slip through.

She blinked in genuine surprise and puzzlement as she came eye to whatever part it was she saw of the other. All she saw was more plastic, clear this time, covering unrecognisable clothing of a colour she couldn't distinguish. The light shining brightly onto her made the plastic gleam viciously and whatever the individual wore underneath it was near invisible to her. She blinked rapidly to get rid of the tears that had appeared in her eyes thanks to the glare of the light on plastic before she tried to raise her head a bit to see the face of whoever it was. She quickly found her muscles were still not strong enough to lift it, so she halted her attempt and didn't move her head from its current position. She wanted to know with what, or whom, she was dealing.

"Ah, I see you are awake," a familiar, accented voice sounded, though she couldn't immediately place it. The bleariness and befuddlement of her mind made it hard to think, "welcome, miss Lounds, to my humble abode."

The man, and she could determine that it was a male both due to his stature and due to the fact that statistically speaking men were more often the perpetrator, moved past the curtain to pick up whatever it was he brought with him. He walked back towards the head of whatever she was resting on and placed something there. She could easily discern the sound of metal being placed on metal.

He drew the curtains closed again when he was done, and turned back towards her. The act of closing the curtains had positioned him away from her head and more towards the general location of her waist. With some effort she manipulated her head just enough to look up at him.

“Wha-?” she managed to choke out, stunned. Because, while still not completely in the light, she easily recognised the shadowed but familiar features of one Hannibal Lecter. She had taken enough photos of him in different shadings of lightning to recognise him on sight. She had never been able to read him, he truly didn’t show a lot of emotions and they were minute if he did, but she had no doubt that he was either amused, satisfied or delighted.

While she had stalked him in the past few weeks based on the accusation thrown at him by Graham, his incredibly busy life and the fact that not a single aspect of it would earn her money had removed him firmly from her list of people to watch out for. Ever since, she had not once considered him to be a threat. She had forgotten that the Ripper had long periods of no actions between his *sounders*.

He tilted his head as he considered her, the sharp snap of gloves being put into place sounded oddly loud in the enclosed space, “does my appearance truly shock you? I am aware you have been following me for some time. You must have suspected something.”
“G’a- Ham,” she forced her lips and tongue to shape the name.
“Will?” Lecter asked mildly curious, “he is not here, if you were trying to accuse him of anything. In fact, he has no consideration for your location, or that I have *liberated* you from that ostentatious hotel you were staying in. He is not aware, but he simply does not care either.”

“Gra- Ham,” she managed to repeat faintly, “righ- t.”
“Ah,” her captor said with a small smile that crinkled his sharp eyes even as he made his way back towards the top of whatever she was laying on. He seemed almost proud when he said, “well yes, he was in fact quite accurate when it came to my person. In fact, I have yet to find a situation or individual my dear Will was not correct about.”

She heard him pick something up, before the soft ting of metal to metal made its way to her, followed by the sound of him selecting something else. She turned her head gently as far as she could so she could keep an eye on at least a part of him. She didn’t want him out of her sight now that she *knew* he was dangerous to her.

“If it makes you feel better,” he mused as he studied something. She couldn’t quite see what he had picked up but it couldn’t be good, “you will never see him again, nor will he have to look at you once I am done. After everything you have written about him, they will never let him near the crime scene or your corpse.”

“Wha’re you g’ing ‘o do wi’h me?” she slowly articulated. Her brain started to feel more clear, and she could feel the panic and adrenaline start to race through her body. Sadly, when she tried, she could still produce nothing more than a slight movement with her hands or her feet. She hadn’t been bound, she could see that much, but he must have given her something.

He made his way back towards the middle of whatever she had been placed upon. She was now aware that it was made out of metal, which explained the cold and hardness she felt, but she still couldn’t quite see it. However, she had a sinking feeling that she knew exactly what she was laying on. If Graham was correct about every single accusation he had connected to the non-emotive serial killer currently smirking down at her, she wouldn’t just end up being painfully murdered. She would be *butchered* alive.

“You recently wrote such a delightful piece of sensationalism,” Lecter told her while ignoring her slurred question. He raised a sharp looking, slender, serrated knife to peer at it, “the dreadfully tedious killer you christened the Tarot Tormentor is going to react to your offensive speculations.”

“’hey will know,” she said sluggishly. Speech came more easily to her but her body still wouldn’t corporate, no matter how hard she tried, “’hey will know i’ wasn’ ‘im.”

“They really will not. They will not know what to look for, and they will not care by the time your remains are found,” he gently corrected her, even as he brought down the knife and started to gently but confidentially cut a shallow line along the bottom line of her left breast. His other, gloved hand was placed just above where he was cutting into her, and it while warm compared to the cool environment, it felt clinical against her skin. Even though he was practically cupping her breast, there was nothing sexual about it. The knife was sharp, and while blood immediately welled up, it took a short while before the slight burn of the cut made itself known.

Lecter briefly stopped as the cut was finished, before he made a similar shallow, half moon shaped cut just above her left nipple. Once finished, he extended the sides of the bottom cut until the matched the starting points of the upper cut.

He leaned over her slightly to place the now bloody knife down and to take a new one into hand. He used that one to excruciately slowly remove her left breast. She screamed. It hurt like nothing had ever hurt before. It felt as if liquid fire made its way along the location where he was slicing her open. She would have blacked out, but a sharp pinch of a needle in her right arm followed by something being injected kept her conscious.

The serial killer she had given the call sign of the Tarot Tormentor had left five bodies behind. His victims were all women between the ages of 25 to 40, with light skin colours, and all of them had been slight and slender. All of them had been mutilated peri to post mortem so their bodies would form a certain, badly shaped figure. As far as she had managed to discover, all of them had been strangled before they had been cut into. It was because of her eavesdropping on a local police meeting with the Feds that she had discovered that the shapes were based on some type of tarot cards. Hence the name. So far, a star, a mineral, a cup, a hand, and a sun had been made out of bodies.

The perp had cut open or removed any parts of the women that he had deemed to be unsuitable or unwanted for his symbols. The cup victim, for example, had had her legs below the knees, her head and her neck removed and her upper body split into two. The two separate parts of the rib cage had formed the cup shape, her arms had been the rim and the remains of her legs had formed the foot of the cup.

She did not want to know what she would be turned into.

“Did you know it was Will who recognised that the bodies were shaped to form alchemical esoteric symbols?” the Ripper asked her conversationally as he started on her other breast. Tears were dripping down her cheeks and it took massive effort to actually understand what he was saying, “agent Crawford was of course very sceptical at first, no creativity or

superstition in that one, but he had to agree when my darling showed him the particular deck the perpetrator had used as inspiration."

The soft sound of fatty flesh hitting the metal surgery table could be heard, followed by the ting of the scalpel being placed down. Needle and thread was picked up and he started to pierce the loose upper skin of what had once been a nicely shaped breast. He skilfully sewed the upper and lower borders together, first the left side, followed by the right side.

"Graham will know it isn't the same killer," she gritted out through clenched teeth.
"Oh, he would," Lecter agreed, sickly proud of someone who would see him behind bars if he slipped up, "but as I mentioned, your written abuse and your conduct towards him will ensure that no one within the Bureau will show him any pictures of your remains until his alibi has checked out. They will not ask him to look into your case. It also means that he might not care to find your *true* killer, either."

He smiled down at her, before he turned her over onto her right side, "in case you were curious, he is currently lecturing a classful of promising future forensic investigators. By the time you have passed away, he will be having drinks with his students and his fellow lecturers at the George Washington University. My own alibi is currently dozing in bath while firmly believing that I am cooking her a delightful boeuf bourguignon with a nice side of freshly baked, herb-filled bread."

He hummed as he picked up his knife again and with sure hands started to cut into her left lower cheek. His voice sounded distant, but it had nothing to do with where he was currently standing or the acoustics of the room, "by the time they will finally show you to him, the actual killer of those five innocents will be dead and you will be seen as victim number 6. His last one before his untimely but violent death, in fact."

He fell silent after that as he meticulously removed the muscles and fat of her buttocks and upper part of her thighs. He turned her over to her other side as soon as he was done and started on the other one. She started to feel woozy as more and more blood left her body unchecked. He wouldn't have hit any of the major arteries or veins from what she knew of his skills, but that didn't mean that she was losing blood.

"You should be honoured," he finally said as he rolled her once again onto her back. Her vision was starting to turn black again, though she doubted that any chemical concoction would keep her awake now, "you will finally be known throughout the world and parts of you will finally be found *palatable*."

She blinked hazily up at him. He smiled down upon her from where he had made his way over towards the head of the table she was laying on, the light an aureole around his head that made his eyes deep-set and appear nearly black.
"Goodbye miss Lounds," was the last she heard as a noose was slipped around her neck and tightened slowly.

oOo

The remains of Freddy Lounds were found in the woods near Fairview, Oklahoma, five days after she had disappeared from the hotel she had been staying in in the general area of

Wichita, Kansas.

As her body had been shaped into the form of a crescent moon and as it was near enough to the other five victims who had been similarly shaped into esoteric forms, the FBI had been contacted.

Based on the evidence and the state of the body, it was determined that she had died the day after she had gone missing. As predicted, both Will and Hannibal had had to provide an alibi due to the identity of the victim. Both were cleared of any suspicion of involvement as both had been seen in public in respectively Virginia or Maryland for at least part of the time and both had decent alibis for the actual time of kidnapping and time of death.

The serial killer christened as the Tarot Tormentor was caught not long after near Tulsa, and shot during his arrest. He died before he could reach the hospital. The missing pieces of the six women was never found.

When Will was finally shown pictured of the grisly remains, he immediately pointed out the evidence and skills needed that connected the kill to another murderer entirely. He was ignored as both the local police and the FBI were not willing to even consider a copycat killer. Crawford did listen, but there was nothing he could officially do.

About ten weeks after the end of that case, Hannibal Lecter served a deboned, lightly dried, cured ham to his guests.

The Conference: Paradise Lost

Chapter Notes

And it is finally here: Hannibal manages to meet up with Will.

Nice to know: Pietro Bernardone is mentioned in Dante's Paradiso.

This particular yearly psychiatry summit was exactly as he had feared it would be. It was a smaller one, less well-known. Normally the more rural psychologists in the area in and around Ohio attended it, and even than it barely reached the triple digits.

And yet, a lot of well-known psychiatrists and psychologists were present at this specific edition of the conference, he himself included. All of them where here because of the exact same reason, or he should say, for the exact same person. *Will Graham* was one of the speakers at this particular event.

Frederick Chilton was noticeably absent, and *his* incarceration was one of the many topics of interest the therapists wanted to discuss with Will.

The location could have been chosen with more consideration, as they had appeared to settle for the first seemingly fancy hotel they could have found. They had been forced to move out of their normal location due to the significant increase of both the amount and the reputation of the additional participants, so they had chosen for a hotel at the edge of Athens, Ohio. It was not bad, but it was not what most of the therapists present were used to.

The food and drinks could be classed as mediocre at best, but while the lips of some especially arrogant, discourteous colleagues were raised in a sneer of disdain, the networking and catch-up hour would be as well-attended as always. He had been glad for multiple reasons that he had chosen to stay in an appartement much more to his taste about half an hour away from the conference location. The provided refreshments were just one such incentive.

It had surprised quite a few of them when they had been informed through the grapevine that *the* Will Graham would present something about the effect of diseases on the mind of the criminally insane. The fact that he had chosen, or been asked to, present on such a unknown and normally small psychiatry conference was not even the greatest surprise. No, that had been reserved for the fact that Will was even presenting anything on a psychiatry symposium at all. His intense dislike for anything related to those in that particular field was not only well-known, it was legendary. Almost as famous, or infamous, as the rumours surrounding the way his mind works.

Not a lot of people were aware or cared that dear Will had a degree, even a doctorate, in both forensic psychology, forensic profiling and the more science side of forensic investigations. All they saw was his ability to emphasis with anyone, the almost magical skills that made him appear to read the minds of others, and his ability to unconsciously mimic whoever he was talking to.
He was delighted that he had gotten to meet the true Will behind all of that.

Will had made it very clear in the summary posted on the website that his presentation would not concern itself with the cases related to sociopathy or the other mentally violent, but those that caused hurt and even death to others as symptom of more rare, normally non-violent disorders.

The article that went with the presentation had described among others Cotard's syndrome, it had reminded Hannibal strongly of Georgia Madchen's case, but also the case of an individual who had survived a significant case of blunt force trauma to the head and the changes it had brough to them. It was clear that he was referring to the Peter Bernardone case. Hannibal was curious how he knew of the case, as he was aware that Will had not consulted on that one. Or, to be more honest, he would have loved to see how Will would have reacted to Clark Ingram and his relationship to Peter Bernardone.

Jack had frequently and loudly complained about the fact that Will had been absent at his office during the duration of the case. Up until now, Hannibal had assumed that he was the only individual outside of the two involved that had clocked Ingram as being the true perpetrator. If Will had had full access to the files, he might have deduced the same. He wondered if he would mention it during his presentation.

He was pleased that Alana could not make it to this particular conference as it meant that he could focus all of his attention on Will, where it rightfully should be. This would be the first time in *months* that they would meet face to face.

oOo

The first thing he noticed now that he was finally in the same room as Will, was that he looked good.

His naturally pale skin was lightly tanned due to his more outdoor lifestyle, but it was smooth and looked healthy. His dark curls were still a fly-away mess, but they were glossy. His facial hair was neatly trimmed, and his slate grey eyes hidden partially behind the customary black glasses lacked the dark shadows they had always had and looked sharp and intelligent. His combination of dark tan slacks, blue-on-white chequered dress shirt and unpolished dress shoes appeared to be the same he had always worn in the past. However, they finally seemed to fit him decently as he seemed to have filled out in a healthy way. He was especially fond of the lightly tanned, muscular arms that Will showed off as the sleeves of his dress shirt were rolled back towards the elbows.

He was aware that his pupils had most likely dilated the moment his eyes had alighted upon the younger man. Luckily, he could blame it, and the slightly more pronounced inhale, on the terrible lightning in case anyone would dare to comment on it.

“Good afternoon everyone,” Will started politely. He easily appeared to meet the eyes of everyone present, though Hannibal was aware that they would appear as silhouettes to him with the way the spots were turned.

The organisers had given Will the largest room they had due to the amount of people who had enrolled in this particular presentation, and it was filled to the brim. All chairs were taken, and some people were standing against the walls or in the walkways. He himself had been luckily enough to get a seat on the third row, near the end of the row even, so he hoped to be able to rise in time to catch Will at the end of his talk.

“Before I start with my actual presentation, please be aware that I will not answer any question about myself, the way my mind and brain works, my incarceration or my work as a profiler,” he told them all firmly, “any questions asked with regard to those topics will be answered with silence only, the one asking will be strictly ignored. This presentation is not about me, and I will not allow any of you to steer it into that direction. If anyone present is only attending my talk because of that, than please leave now so someone who actually wants to hear about and discuss this topic can attend.”

Some laughter and soft whispers could be heard, but it was clear that quite some people here either believed that they could make him talk about himself anyway, or were disappointed. No one left, however.

He made a note of the faces of those near to him who leant to the first of the two sides. It was rude to disregard the dear boy’s boundaries like that.

“Now that that is cleared up,” Will said dryly, “let me start with a question. How many of you have had to deal with a sudden burst of violence from a patient that you diagnosed with a fairly benign mental disorder? Someone who, while mentally atypically, has never shown violent or destructive behaviour before?”

Scattered whispers once again started up as about a third of those present raised a hand. Hannibal was among them as he had his own experience with patients suddenly turning violent, more often than not because of his own actions or inactions. It was always so delightful to see how people could *break*.

“Thank you,” Will continued, “in how many of these cases did it concern a single individual with a diagnosis that you have handled before and or a treatment that you have used at least five times before?”

This time a smaller group raised their hand. At a guess, he would say that about ten percent of the group had their hands raised. He was once again among those who had their hand raised.

“Thank you,” Will said, “those individuals are what I want to discuss with you today: those infrequent cases in which individuals with a rare or fairly benign mental disorder suddenly commit murder. The cases I will bring forth are concerned with individuals either born with their mental disorder, or who gained them throughout life by, for example, an accident. Sociopathy or mental disorder caused by severe traumas are not part of the scope of this research.”

He briefly observed all of those present once more. Hannibal tried to meet his eyes, but Will did not rest his gaze on him. He blamed the lights for the fact that his darling could not see him.

“Please wait with asking your questions until I am done with the main presentation. There will be more than enough time to discuss any questions or any additional points you might have at the end,” he told them, “without further ado, I would like to start with the case of…”

oOo

Dear Will was almost immediately surrounded by psychiatrists and psychologists alike the moment he had finished his presentation. He was glad for it, as it meant that he could wait a bit longer in his seat and that he would not have to wrestle his way through the throng towards him. Or, much more uncouth, have to make a particularly ungraceful beeline towards him. He would leave that to the others who vied for the profiler’s attention.

The talk itself had been fascinating and insightful, as he had expected from Will. His arguments were well-rounded and even though each case was different, he showed that there was a common theme in the way these people just wanted to take back control.

Some individuals had indeed tried to ask personal questions, but Will had ignored them. Some others had tried to ask questions about the actual topic, but it had become clear almost instantly that they too had only attended because of Will and not because of the topic. Those who had asked questions that were answered in the paper itself were directed to read it before they contacted him on the provided mail address with any additional questions. It was, not surprisingly, the email address assigned to him by the George Washington University and not his personal one.

Hannibal waited patiently until most of the attendees had left the room before he stood, straightened the slate grey tie that matched a certain pair of eyes exactly, neatened his burgundy waistcoat and jacket and made his way towards Will, who looked far more dishevelled than he had at the start of his talk.

He was truly glad that Alana had not been able to make it. It not only meant that he could fully focus on Will both during the presentation and afterwards without having to pay her any mind, but it also meant that she was not present to see him pay *intimately* close attention to Will. Too close for a mere friendship, in any way.

Some hopefuls who had still tried to get Will to open up about himself had already left in disappointment as he had not even reacted to their presence, let alone their questions.
As it was, those still around him were actually asking relevant questions about the topic and a discussion had started about the Bernardone case.

He waited patiently until he saw his moment. It came not too long after he had approached as a natural moment of silence fell among the group. Will turned away slightly as if to get his papers, and the others – four men and one women – seemed to consider what had been said or discussed.

“Pardon me for interrupting, gentlemen, my lady,” he said with a charming albeit fake smile aimed at all present, before he focused fully on Will. He was aware that both the smile turned genuine and his eyes softened when he let them rest on his dear, dear friend, “Let me first compliment you, Will, for the clear and concise article and presentation. I enjoyed reading it and it helped clarify some issues I have had with patients in the past.”

Will finally turned those lovely, though partially hidden, eyes towards him but it was the unknown woman, dressed casually in jeans and a slightly faded pale green blouse that only just accentuated the colour of her eyes, that smiled in welcome and held her hand out first. The others seemed too intimidated by him, or too unwilling to engage with him to take the first step.

“Mara Janssen,” she introduced herself. Her accent sounded somewhat like the locals, and her grip was strong when he shook her hand, “rural psychologist with a focus on children with an inborn mental disorder.”
“Hannibal Lecter,” he said as he shook her hand, “psychiatrist.”

He held his hand towards the other men, and was in quick succession made acquaintance or reacquaintance with the others present before he turned back towards Will.

“You already know each other?” Mara asked both him and Will as no introduction was made between them nor any attempt to shake hands took place.
“We have met,” Will stated gruffly. He looked anything but happy to see him and in fact seemed ready to extract himself from the group and situation as soon as he could. He frowned minutely, but subtly moved to the side so he would both be closer to his dear Will and so his darling friend could not make his escape.

Will glared balefully at him, fully meeting his eyes and not looking away. He would always miss the almost naïve trust, uncomplicated affection and easy joy that would alight in those eyes during their brief contact before the illness had made itself known. He thrilled however in the fierceness the other man showed and the length of the eye contact he could have now. Only the absence of the barrier of clear glass currently between their gazes could have improved this precious moment.

Hannibal just smiled at him, aware that his own gaze was smouldering and delighted in return.
“I hope I am not repeating an already discussed point, but I was curious on your stance on outside influence in the cases you described in your article,” he said, “as you mentioned that while these influences are clearly present, it is very hard to either determine if and when their actual impact on the individual has taken place and if or when they are the catalyst for the actual violent burst.”

“You aren’t,” Will stated curtly, his beautiful face marred with his annoyance and his agitation, “and yes, I wrote that.”

He had crossed his arms and he had started ticking on finger against the opposite arm. It was clear to everyone that he was done with the situation, and two of the men excused themselves. The other three seemed inquisitive about his physical response to him, but also interested in the point he had brough to the table.

Will breathed in heavily through his nose and eyed him belligerently, “in some cases that outside catalyst can have happened years ago, without any evidence that it had significantly impacted or influenced the individual at the time. Case in point, the grief that comes with the loss of a beloved parent or sibling at a considerable young age that is suddenly reawakened when the individual gains a similar attachment to someone new, someone still alive at the time the grief reawakens. We might see the symptoms of that grief, but we might never recognise it as such if we cannot determine where it comes from. Depending on the age of the individual when they first lost their dearly beloved, they might never remember the death or their loved one, but the impact is still there.”

Mara nodded, recognition clear in her eyes. Hannibal just smiled at Will, glad to see that sharp, focused intelligence in use.

“And how does that lead to aggression?” one of others asked, “while grief might lead to anger and desperation, true aggression nearly never appears. And even if it does, the violence never comes as a surprise in those rare cases.”

“That actually depends on the age and how the loved one was killed,” Will said neutrally as turned towards the other therapist. He immediately missed those slate grey eyes on him, even though they had been attempting to glare holes into him, “say that the individual, regardless of what mental disorder they have but let us assume it is inborn, was barely two years old when their older sister was violently raped and murdered. Say the parents were traumatised, and didn’t talk about what happened to the girl though they never denied her existence. They also never saw the younger, surviving child, regardless of its gender, as a replacement and raised it with all the care and love they had. The individual in this case was raised well, the parents weren’t distant or absent. The fact that they used to have an older sibling was also never denied. The child was even made aware of the loss and untimely death of their sister. The parents were slightly overprotective, but not the full helicopter parent type either. Recognisable?”

The others nodded in understanding, and he smiled lightly. Will truly was an enjoyable sight to see when in his element.

“Contrary to what the parents might believe, the child would have heard or seen something about what happened to their sister, but at that age it is likely they wouldn’t have remembered the specifics,” he continued to lecture, “however, it would have done something to the child’s brain. Let us assume the now adult individual, bit different and weird but kind and highly functioning, comes into a situation where a girl at a similar age to their sister is threatened with something similar to what happened to her. Regardless of how much the former child knows, they will subconsciously determine the consequences if the threat were to become reality, and-”

“That individual might lash out violently,” Hannibal stated confidentially. He normally would not have interrupted Will, but he wanted those eyes back on him.
“Yes,” Will gritted out through clenched teeth. That delicious glare was turned back on him, “with that background it doesn’t come as a complete surprise, but if you weren’t aware of the history…”

The others looked thoughtful and he smiled at him. He opened his mouth to say something else, but someone else made their way into the room. It was an older male, dressed in a but well-treated, lightly faded black suit of an older cut that was no longer in fashion. He carried a doctor's bag with him.

"I am sorry to interrupt," he said a bit harried, "but I have to present here in five minutes. Would you mind?"

Will shook his head and made space for him as he removed his own papers, and put them neatly into his own bag before he left without a backward glance. The others had already made their way out of the hall by the time he was done, but he waited patiently on him. He could finally have his full attention if he played his cards well.

Will shot him another baleful look as he fell into step besides him. He walked slightly faster than he normally would have, but he did not outright run to get away from him.

"How have you been, Will?" he asked him as soon as they were out of rapidly filling hall, "I am delighted to see you look well."

Will stopped and turned towards him. He seemed livid as he snarled out softly, "as opposed to how I looked while you had me *placed* in the tender mercies of Chilton? Or opposed to how I looked while my brain was *boiling* inside my skull and *you knew* and did nothing to cure it?"

People stopped to watch them. Will seemed aware of them as he made a noise of disgust, turned back towards where they had been going and continued walking without waiting for a response. Hannibal trotted beside him, keen to spend more time with him and to fix their relationship.

Will steered him through the conference side of the hotel until they had reached the nearly empty lobby. He nodded politely towards the woman manning the desk and walked outside. The weather was dreary, with clouds and the probability of rain heavy in the air. They were the only ones currently outside.

Will kept on walking until he reached a sitting area near the front door. He sat down on the lichen-filled, damp, unclean wooden bench. He followed suit and sat on the other side of the table with a slight moue of disgust he did not bother to hide. Will would see through him anyway and it would make him appear more humane.

"Will-," he started gently but Will interrupted him.

"No," was all he stated, "for once, you just listen. You love to hear your own voice, I am sure, but if you want my attention, you listen. *Actually listen*. You have no doubt wondered why I haven't responded to any of your messages-"

He started to react but Will shot him a dark glare over those unfortunate spectacles and interrupted him bluntly, "you are inherently a dishonest, sadistic man who selfishly cares little but for his own amusement and creature comforts. As I told you, I prefer the sin of omission to outright lies. Yet you lied to me repeatedly and about things that were truly

dangerous to and for my health. Even now, had I even wanted to, I can't believe a single word you say or any message you send. I doubt you even know how to tell or show the truth at this point."

He eyed him warily for a short while before he continued. His face showed him to be more weary and grieved than the resentment and annoyance he had shown before. Hannibal felt his heart ache at the sight of him.

"I genuinely believed us to be friends," he told him even as he rubbed a hand over his eyes before he dropped it back down again, "and I don't really have a lot of those. You made it very clear however that whatever it is we were, friends was not it. Chess master and trifling scapegoat seems more likely."

He laughed hollowly and Hannibal once again made to say something to him, anything to ease the hurt he had caused but also indignant about the words that had been spoken. They might be partially true, but they still hit him harshly. Will was more than just a scapegoat or a pawn to him, he genuinely enjoyed his presence, "Will-"

"Whatever it was, it was as toxic a relationship as it could get," Will stated softly, the pain of betrayal clearly shining through. He abruptly stood up from he had been sitting and he once again collected his bag.

He tried to reach out to him, but the snarl that was sent his way, while beautifully fierce, made him retract his hand.

"Just- No," he said softly before he repeated, "I can neither trust you, your words nor your actions. Just leave me alone. No more contact, no more letters, no more gifts and no more trying to talk to me. I don't care to know what you do, where you are, or what you want from me. I am done with you."

Without a single look backwards and with no regard for the fact that he had ungracefully risen from the bench he had been sitting on, he walked away from him. As if to punish him for his transactions against Will, the sky opened up and it started to rain.

The End of an Affair

Chapter Notes

Alright, hereby the last chapter of Hannibal's part. Enjoy!

Fair warning: I took some liberties with the car Hannibal drives. In the series it is a Bentley Arnage 2000 red label. However, I really could not compare that one to the Mustang and the Jaguar, so I went for a contemporary Bentley similar to the Arnage: the Flying Spur.

Important notice: I am nearly finished with Will's part but due to personal circumstances I am not quite finished yet. So, to make sure it is fully done, I am taking a break of three weeks before I'll start posting Will's story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He heard the high-pitched, sceptical laugh of one of his female associates come from his left side and his collocutor turned towards the sound with slight, faintly amused smirk and a raised eyebrow.
He followed her example and turned slightly to the left, and therefore towards Alana, to physically join the conversation.

"-*courting* you?" he heard said and he felt Alana straighten in clear pride.
"Of course not, but we *are* together. You can ask him yourself," she stated dryly, before she turned towards him with a flutter of her eye lashes and leaned herself against him. Or at least, she tried. He was not one for public displays of intimacy, and he kept his stance relaxed but closed off from her with his arm parallel to his side and not around her as she might have hoped for. Her posture and position was mostly subconscious on her part, but she was openly and knowingly flirting with him.

He had always wondered why women and some assorted men felt the need to bat their cilia when they wanted something from a man. He was aware that she was not actually sexually aroused, he would have smelled that, but that she wanted to play upon his protective instinct somehow.

He knew that the current environment could be incredibly hostile, with the wealthy acting like well-dressed and well-healed vultures. They remained polite, always, but the verbal prodding and dissections could become incredibly vicious. He had always enjoyed that triteness within the very people who *despised* being seen as banal. It was, however, not an environs he felt she needed protection in.

Privately amused, he wondered what she wanted to be protected from if not the wealthy. What could frighten a psychiatrist who dealt with the mentally deficient individuals who

were capable of acts that horrified the majority of humanity? The monsters of this world, among which he could be counted? The piercing, judgemental gazes of his peers?

“We are together, Hannibal, are we not?” she asked him as she lightly stroked the left lapel of his formal dinner jacket. It was not as overly exhibitive as some of his more obnoxious, and very short, dalliances had been. He was normally very fastidious about his chosen lovers, but every once in a while an interesting acquaintance acted different after they had become more *intimate*. He was always quick to make it very evident that he was not interested in being objectified or being turned into a display for the amusement or security of others.

He sometimes wondered if he would feel similar if it had been *Will* on his arm, flirting with him, touching him so casually. He was never quite sure of the answer, though his dream had shown him that he at least subconsciously wished to do something as trivial as *hold hands* with the younger man.

Alana was not trying to be unbearable about it, but she was somewhat possessive of him. She had always been, both when she had been his mentee and he had *saved* her, and when they had been friendly acquaintances. Now that they were having their little affair, she felt confident enough to touch him in public in a manner she had never before.

He wondered not for the first time if she had been as possessive of Will as she was of him. She had never let anyone within their community know that she knew him and had access to his brain and way of thinking, after all.

“I brought you as my plus one for this season’s opening, yes,” he responded calmly with a slightly raised eyebrow in feigned curiosity. He was aware of what she was attempting to achieve. She was far from the first one to try and turn a brief affair with him into something else, though she truly did so because she was infatuated with him. Most of the others had been after his wealth or his status only.

Alana stuck out her painted underlip in a slight pout as she nestled even closer to him. It was meant to entice, but it just made him exasperated. He had made it very, plainly clear to her that he was looking for a distraction with her. A pleasant, but short entanglement, and not for a spouse. She was not the one he envisioned in that role if he even considered his marital status. Or lack thereof.

He would cook for her, he would share his evenings and bed with her one or two times a week, and he would take her along to certain events or join her if she had any. But he would not show her off as his partner, their lives remained separate, and after a while they would go their own, distinct way. She was not the person he wanted to become domestic with. *That* honour was for another brunette.

It was obvious that she wanted more from him, however, and that she expected to get it. This was the third event in as many weeks that she was insisted to join in on, and normally that would mean something within the society he was part of. However, it was known that he only had dalliances and she was not the first one he had brought along for a handful of nights in succession. In fact, one of his longest affairs had been with a married soprano who had accompanied him for little over a year. Even then, it had evidently been a not so secret,

opportunistic liaison on both sides and not an actual relationship. The woman's husband had even been aware and had heartily approved it, though he adored her very much.

The scepticism and amusement of his acquaintances was therefore not a surprise. Just like some of his shorter entanglements in the past, though less obnoxious, Alana was too naively obvious about her intentions and her wishes.

She looked beautiful, dressed as she was in a burgundy red dress and her nearly black heels, her dark hair in an elegant updo, and her make-up used to highlight her fine features. However, she would get no compliment or credits here as she had tried too hard. The dress was clearly expensive to the point of being gaudy, the heels were too recognisably from a known brand, and her make-up and hair was noticeably done by someone famous for their work. Compared to his own understated, well-fitting three piece suit made from the finest quality material in solid black and crisp white, she was metaphorically wearing the price tag on her non-existing sleeve.

One did not need to display the wealth one had. Or in her case, the wealth she believed she needed to showcase as being her own so as not to be seen as a gold digger.

"Alana, please, keep some decorum," he chided her softly and gently as he removed himself from her grasp. Some of the individuals near them would hear it, of course, but they were too polite to draw attention to her. Too polite, yes, but they were not kind and Alana would be discussed in private conversations for the foreseeable future.

She appeared properly chastened, but he knew that she would bring their relationship status up when they were alone. For now, however, she would leave him be to enjoy his evening.

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Their affair did have its positive aspects. Alana was intelligent and could be insightful, and made a lovely dinner partner on top of a decent alibi. She had also a direct connection to Will and was more than willing to talk about him due to her worry about him.

At first, when she had still been angry with the darling special agent, it was because she worried for *his* safety. Will had him nearly killed after all. Later, when she had been made to realise that that worry was not only unfounded but the unsolicited attack had happened to keep *her* safe from a perceived threat, it was because she worried about Will's state of mind.

Regardless, it kept him as up to date about Will as he could get without talking to the man.

It also helped that she was a decent lover.

However, it was not enough and the negatives far outweighed the positives.

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Alana had asked him to join her for a class reunion of her college or high school and, as he had some business in the area anyway, he had promised he would join her for at least part of it. While he was aware that she wanted to renew contacts with former classmates and show

off her own success in life, of which he and their affair were a part, he saw it as an anthropological excursion into a specific part of the American culture.

He had always been fascinated with the way his patients acted and reacted when they mentioned their class reunion. It caused heavy anxiety in some of them as they had the feeling that they had too show off their success in life, in others it created sheer spite when they discussed the very idea of going. When he had made the mistake to search online for more information on the phenomenon, he had been taken aback by the sheer amount of references to popular media he had found. He was looking forward to see for himself how a class reunion differed from his alumni engagements.

He had made his way over towards the car rental desk as soon as his plane had landed and he had gotten his luggage. He was not staying long, but he had chosen to have his suits and assorted tools flown in as special baggage.

The procedure at the rental desk had taken more time than expected, as Alana had promised him she had already booked a specific car for him she was sure he would like. Instead of just signing and paying, however, he had quickly realised that the car chosen by her would not fit with his preferences. She had reserved a Jaguar F-type for him, and while that specific brand and specific type of car was normally one he would have appreciated, she had gone for price over performance. The engine was just not up to par, and it lacked space for both passengers and luggage. In the end he had gone for the Ford Mustang GT Fastback with a better engine, more power and more room to store certain *items*.

On the other hand, his *business* took less time than he had expected and the visit with one of his acquaintances he was using as an alibi was pleasant and took up most of his afternoon and part of the early evening. The gap of time in which he could not be accounted for, the short period between his arrival on the airport and said visit, could easily be excused by his rental car. After all, which car enthusiast, not that he would describe himself as such, would not want to try out a new model they had not driven before? If anyone were to think to look for the GPS data of the car, or the car tracker itself, it would not show him anywhere near the remains of his victim, the location of his victim's car, or the last location his victim had been seen at. Technology would form the best alibi he could wish for.

He arrived only four hours after the start of Alana's school reunion and without much fanfare. He entered the main room of the hired conference centre as soon as he realised that Alana was not near the entrance and he looked around with some diversive curiosity.

The room was festively decorated with colourful buntings and flags hanging from the walls and ceiling, with banners welcoming the alumni home for the weekend, and large stars painted gold and silver decorating every empty spot. It looked almost elegant, in a nearly childish manner.

The people present were casually dressed in clearly newly bought clothing with the intention to impress, and he felt a slight pang of disappointment at Alana for wanting to be part of the sheer pretentiousness of everyone present. The reunion was not so much about meeting up with individuals one had been close with during their formative period, but entirely about showing off how far they made it in life. While at least some of those present were actually

trying to catch up with people they had not seen for a while, most of them already knew one another and were just trying to impress everyone present.

It appeared as if the short blurs he had read on class reunions in popular media had been right after all, though they had exaggerated the details and the drama.

As far as he could determine from both the cars parked near the centre and the clothing, the overly tanned and overly trained, but essentially unfunctional muscularity, the watches and jewellery displayed, only the successful people or the ones that would love nothing more than to see their bullies finally brought down were present. The ones who would be deemed unsuccessful did not dare appear at such events.

It became apparent why Alana had reserved the Jaguar for him, the Mustang was conspicuous between the expensive, mainly European, import cars. He wondered with some amusement if she would have flown in his Bentley Flying Spur if she could have paid for it, or if she could have convinced him to do so on her behalf for the short period he was in the state.

Even his navy bleu, three-piece, bespoke suit matched with an off-white dress shirt, a burgundy tie, and neatly shined black dress shoes was distinguished, though it was an outfit he regularly wore. Most people present showed off their casual but expensive brand polos and jeans, their brand hand bags large enough to be considered ludicrously capacious, their overly large brand watches that made bending the wrist tiresome, their brand shoes and their brand jewellery. This was a crowd that firmly believed that the more recognizable the brands they wore were, the more obvious the wealth they had was.

He pondered briefly if Will would go to the reunion of one of his many high schools, but he expelled the thought immediately. Will would not care for such a *shindig*, which consisted of crowds of people looking down on him for not caring to dress for the occasion, superficial people bragging about accomplishments they had not truly achieved or earned, and not a single interesting or in depth conversation to be found. Will would not even consider going, no matter how successful he was or how much money he had earned. It was a shame. He would have enjoyed displaying himself for Will and his intelligence to the reprehensible masses, and not in the way he normally displayed the undeserving.

He was glad to see that he had missed the dinner and speech part, and that the alumni were currently mingling. It meant that he would not have to give an excuse for not joining the buffet. He briefly entertained getting a glass of wine, but the lack of actual glassware made him reconsider.

In the end, it was the yearbook that drew his attention and he started to leave through it to see if he could find Alana, or someone else he might know in passing.

“Hannibal!” Alana said delighted but loudly, and he looked up from the page he had been scanning. It was clear to him that she had already partaken copiously from the wine though she was not quite drunk yet. Her cheeks were stained with a blush that had nothing to do with embarrassment or the room temperature, and she held herself loosely, “you came!”

She made her way over towards him. She hooked her arm possessively through his and kissed him on the cheek in greeting. Like her peers, she was dressed fashionably in a branded

satin, grey-on-red, wrap-around dress and the same dark heels she wore when she joined him for his art-inclined outings.

People had looked up from their conversations at her call and they were quickly joined by some of her former classmates and their spouses. He was aware that they were scrutinising him, his clothing, and Alana's proximity to him. The closest comparison he could think of was fresh meat surrounded by a pack of lowly scavengers. Where his own peers might be similar to sharks or at worst vultures, who at least ate their prey when it was still alive on occasion, these individuals could only be compared to flies. No other scavenger was so weak, so easy to chase away, and incapable of hunting on their own, not even the carrion beetle who would hunt after the larvae of other insects. They were just trying to determine if he was their definition of prey or too much of a bother to deal with. He doubted they realised that he could not care less of their opinion of him.

"Alana," he greeted her calmly in return, "how have you been?"
"Always so polite," she tittered, before she added slyly, "did you like the car I got you?"
"Not particularly," he told her honestly, before he turned towards the men and women surrounding them, "good evening, my name is Hannibal Lecter. I am a colleague of doctor Bloom."

"Not just a colleague, if Alana is right," one of the women said guilefully without introducing herself, "she made you sound like quite the catch."
"You a European count or something?" one of the men, who was clearly already inebriated on the middle-shelf wine, demanded to know, "something Soviet?"
"Like Dracula?" one of the women asked in delight, "your accent sounds similar to that actor in that one movie."

"Something like that," he answered coolly, and he turned his head slightly towards Alana with a raised eyebrow. She did not see it as she leaned forwards and started to boast about him and his achievements.

"What was that about a car?" one of the other men asked forcefully, though the jealousy could be clearly heard, "Alana bought you a car? Is she the breadwinner in your relationship? Did she get you that suit?"
"She booked me a Jaguar at the car rental at the airport," he stated aloofly. He was already getting disinterested in the entire conversation. It did not paint a good picture for the rest of the event.

The crowd they had gained was clearly trying to place him in a certain category. He was unaware what Alana's smug introduction of him when he had been absent had contained, but it was plain that they did not quite know what to make of him. They could not place his accent and he doubted that they even knew where Lithuania was located within Europe. They could not place the brand of his suit, though it was clear to them that it was high-quality. They were aware that he was rich, but they could not determine his monetary worth based on his understated clothing and watch and the lack of any visible brand. His indifference to the vehicle mentioned just bewildered them more.

He, on the other hand, had already determined what class of people he was dealing with. He might not have Will's skills and expertise and he might not be able to read their profession

from their callouses or the way they walked, but he was fully capable of reading people and he had seen enough individuals just like them in his practice. He could easily determine who of those currently surrounding him was cheating on their partner, who was addicted to something, who was bored with their life and trying to fill the emptiness with fancy cars and fancy clothing, and who was feeling unsure about themselves and needed the feeling of power that belittling others brought them.

He was surrounded by mundane, plebeian individuals who suffered from delusions of grandeur because they had money. No, Will would have hated coming to such a reunion, not even to show him off. It would not have been worth the mental drain it would have put on that delightful mind.

“What is wrong with a Jaguar?” the same man asked, his voice somewhere between intrigued and outraged, “too much power in a car for you?”
“There is nothing wrong with the brand itself. The particular car just did not meat my preferences and requirements,” he said neutrally, “the performance of the specific F-type reserved was not up to par so I went for the GT Fastback.”
“A Mustang?” someone new butted in, “are you trying to fit in with the American Dream or something?”

The people around them laughed gleefully at the perceived insult.
“What do you normally drive, a Lada?” the first man piped up with a hiccoughing laugh, to the confusion of some of the others present who evidently did not recognise the name of the brand.
“With that suit?” one of the women chimed in, “some kind of Porsche. One of those cabrio ones.”
“A Boxter,” her probable partner added in agreement, “the kind of car a middle-aged man with some money to spend, a much younger woman as arm candy after a divorce and a mid-life crisis would buy.”

Alana tightened her grip on his arm in clear discomfort at the rudeness. She knew how much he disliked boorish behaviour. They turned towards him, clearly expecting him to answer the unspoked questions. He kept silent, his face relaxed in an aloof expression. What did he care for their opinion on him? They would not even make decent prey to him. Their slights were childish, and showed how weak a character they actually had. He could not bring himself to care for the opinions of a set of frat boys and the ditzy girls getting on in the years trying to relive their school popularity.
She answered hotly in his stead, convinced that such an attack on him was an insult to her, “he was never married, and he drives some kind of luxury car. Something British. The one with the triple headlights.”

That caused the men to laugh louder, “triple headlights? Women and their interest in cars.”
The group moved away, having clearly put him into the category of what had been described before. He had some money, had recently divorced and had fallen into a mid-life crisis so he bought an expensive, sporty car and started dating a woman at least ten years his junior. The people he normally dealt with knew him better than that, even hidden behind his human veil as he was.

“I am so sorry for them,” Alana exclaimed as soon as they had disappeared in the crowd, “but why didn’t you just answer them? You are much better than- than that!”
“Why defend myself against the judgment of people who buy into conspicuous consumption and who seemed keen on re-enacting what they have seen in popular media?” he rebutted her gently, “I know what I can do, what I am worth, and what I prefer. I feel no need to get into discussions with people who carry predefined assumptions.”

“Now, why don’t you introduce me to some people who can actually hold a conversation?” he asked her.

The rest of the night went in similar manner. Most people became drunk on the average quality wine and made fools out of themselves. Alana introduced him to some individuals who could, indeed, carry a decent intercourse and he spent a some somewhat enjoyable hour discussing the merit of Italian, feministic literature with two women while Alana stood sullen by his side.

It became clear to him in the course of the night that she had *exulted* about dating a wealthy, European count-turned-doctor. He felt disappointed at her indiscretion. He did not particularly care that these people knew about their dalliance, but he was piqued by her continued insistence that they were in a romantic relationship. He had informed her time and again that, while he enjoyed her company, he was not going to make it permanent.

They had had their nice moment, of course, but she was not the one he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. After some reflection he had realised that he would, indeed, like to get married sometime in the future. But it would have to be to someone who could fully see him as he was, someone who could challenge him, and someone who could keep up with him. The only one who fit the bill was Will. It helped that he was already completely enamoured with the younger man.

When they were finally alone, just moments before he was to leave for his own temporary residence as he absolutely refused to stay at the hotel connected to the conference centre when there was no kitchen and no refrigerator for the fruits of his *business*, he alerted her to the errors of her ways. He once again made it very clear that what they had was temporary and that, if she could not agree to the set boundaries, she had to inform him at that moment so they could go their own way, permanently.

Alana looked hurt at his words, but he kept his face impassive until she finally, reluctantly, agreed. He did not particularly care either way if he hurt the other doctor or not, but he was somewhat fond of her and did want to keep her around. She just needed to realise that he *did* mean what he had told her frequently. He so disliked having to repeat himself.

The affair had been going on for a handful of months now, and, in the light of her recent demands for more, her worth as an alibi was starting to diminish. Will had not referred to him or the Chesapeake Ripper since he had been released, and the dinners with Jack were stilted on all sides. The time to end their dalliance was rapidly approaching.

He did not kiss her in goodbye when they parted.

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He gradually but carefully withdrew from Alana after that. He knew most affairs did not end on a high note, but he would make sure that whatever *friendship* they would retain afterwards would survive the backlash of the end of theirs without destroying either of their reputations or making her question his innocence. He would loathe to see his meticulous work of entertaining her for *months* in return for a nearly airtight alibi destroyed due to one overly emotional individual.

He stopped notifying her of all art related outings he would have informed her off before. At first, it was just one opening of a new art gallery or one first night of a new opera playing, which he excused to her as being outside her range of interest when it came to art. As she truly would not have cared for the showings, she had little choice but begrudgingly agree.

He also slowly started to cut her out of his broader social life.

He *accidentally* let her see some of the small, neatly wrapped gifts he planned on sending to Will. Items that were distinctly recognisable as wrapped books with supplemented letters were left on his desk where she might see them. Small packages with the logo from a well-known bespoke clothier for *male* costumes were placed in a drawer she knew he did not use for clothing or accessories while she was present. Recipes for dishes with ingredients she did not care for were placed in neat stacks on a unused corner of his counter. He never elaborated what the gifts were or who they were for when she asked.

He started cooking less sophisticated meals when she spent the night, or he left early in the morning for an *emergency appointment* with a client without leaving breakfast or coffee behind for when she woke up. He still kept to his own standards, he would never lower them, but he stopped considering her preferences over his own and he miraculously ran out of the beer she so adored.

He started introducing her to other individuals, both males and females, he believed might attract her amorous attention. When he noticed she got along with someone, he would leave them alone or cite an appointment he had to get ready for.

When she asked about it in an increasingly more desperate manner, he would just tell her he had been busy or that she was only imagining his increasingly distant conduct. It was gaslighting at its mildest. The trick was to make their separation come from her, make it seem as if it was *her* idea to end the affair.

After two months of gently retreating from her life, she finally broke.

“I- uh,” she started after they had finished a, for her, particular uneasy dinner, “I met someone.”
He made a inquiring sound as he gently swirled the sauce around the panna cotta he had made as dessert.
Alana remained silent, but he could almost *taste* her nerves.

“A new patient?” he gently coaxed her along after he finished his plating and handed one of the plates and a small dessert fork to her, “or a new colleague?”
“A date,” she finally blurted out, “she asked me for a date.”

“She?” he turned his full attention towards her. He was curious which of the women he had introduced her to had managed to captivate her. She worried her bottom lip between her teeth the way she had done when she had just been young and just his mentee, and she had been insecure about her own work.

He placed his own plate down and said teasingly, “am I such an insensitive lover that you have forsworn the male sex completely?”
“What-? No!” she immediately exclaimed with a mortified blush and she placed her uneaten dessert down as she instantly jumped to his defence as he knew she would, “No! You are a great lover and you are wonderful in bed! It’s just…”

She trailed of again.
“I have told you multiple times, sometimes not as patiently as I could have, but what we have is nothing more than a brief dalliance,” he told her gently, “if you made the acquaintance of someone who caught your fancy than I implore you to follow your heart.”
Alana looked both relieved and thankful at his words.

“Now, let us have dessert and you can tell me about the siren whose song managed to entice you,” he told her as he picked up his own plate and started to leave the kitchen.
Alana followed his example, and together they made their way towards the dining room.

“It’s Margot, Margot Verger,” she told him between bites, “we started talking during your soiree nearly three months ago…”

He only paid enough attention to her discourse to ask leading questions as he internally savoured his accomplishment. He could finally devote all of his time to gain his own happily ever after.

It was time to go after Will.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your comments and remarks.

If you are interested in Will's part (which is a follow-up of this one), the first chapter of the second part will be posted in the weekend of the first of July.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!